OCT.
35c

# THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

*Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS*

The Plaster Cat
*by Q. PATRICK*

Problem at Pollensa Bay
*by AGATHA CHRISTIE*

Wings of Death
*by CHRISTOPHER BUSH*

The Day of the Cripples
*by VINCENT STARRETT*

Adventure of the Trained Cormorant
*by AUGUST DERLETH*

## THE CAREFUL TERRORIST

A NEW SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION

ONCE UPON A time I used to think that one of the easiest ways of picking up spending money without much risk of being clamped in the calaboose for it was to compile an anthology. The theory was that if you could only sell some publisher the idea that you were qualified to select the twenty best stories of the age, you got your name in the largest type on the cover and collected up to half the resulting royalties for the relatively trivial chore of writing a few pontifical pages of introduction and supplying a list of material to be reprinted.

Of course, like most good rackets this one was eventually run into the ground, most unhappily before I managed to get into it myself. Then to recapture a public which had become fairly blasé about the next pundit's choice of immortalia, and which had probably read about half the titles in other anthologies anyway, it became necessary to hang these samplers on a theme or gimmick, like *The Best Gangster Stories,* or *The Best Sports Stories*—until even these narrower categories were all pre-empted.

Now for more than two years I have had a fraction of the responsibility of getting out an anthology and an introduction every month, in the format of this Magazine; and it no longer seems quite such a breeze, even without any limitation of subject. But there is always some unexpected fun in it.

For instance: Vincent Starrett's THE DAY OF THE CRIPPLES is a brand new story of his famous investigator Jimmie Lavender. August Derleth's THE ADVENTURE OF THE TRAINED CORMORANT is a brand new story of his no less famous Solar Pons, that delightfully satirical double for Sherlock Holmes. To be able to present them both for the first time in one issue would in itself be an event in our editorial record. But what gives it a special spice is that each of these writers is himself an anthologist of distinction. I wonder how they like being collected, and if this shouldn't entitle me to some sort of news headline like *FISH CATCHES MEN.*

But far from resting on these laurels, we have leapt off them as if they were cactus, to round up such eminent scribes as the highly polished Christopher Bush and a newcomer, Patricia Highsmith, of whom we predict that much more will be heard.

We also have old favorites like Q. Patrick and A. Christie, not to mention L. Charteris, who is open to offers from any other anthologist who would like to reprint his newest opus THE CAREFUL TERRORIST.

Leslie Charteris

# You Still Have Time . . .

**—TO COMPLETE YOUR SAINT FILE**
**—OF THE WORLD'S *FINEST* FICTION**
**—BY THE WORLD'S *GREATEST* WRITERS**
**—OF MYSTERY-DETECTIVE *STORIES***

*Here is your opportunity to purchase back issues of* THE SAINT. *But—the first issue, we're sorry to say, is all sold out. A few copies are still available of all others and they are yours by filling in the coupon below.* THE SAINT *is always star-studded by the best writers in the field. We are now offering these at bargain prices —single copies at 35¢; three copies at $1; six copies at $1.75; and twelve copies at $3.25. When ordering, circle the issues desired.*

Names to conjure with are scattered throughout all issues, for the stories are by the most famous writers of mystery, crime and detective fiction in the world—such greats as: Leslie Charteris, Ben Ames Williams, William Faulkner, Ben Hecht, Craig Rice, Philip Wylie, William Irish, H. G. Wells, Damon Runyon, Octavus Roy Cohen, Sax Rohmer, T. S. Stribling, Clarence Budington Kelland, Dorothy L. Sayers, Hugh Wiley, Ellery Queen, Agatha Christie, Ray Bradbury, Graham Greene, Brett Halliday, P. G. Wodehouse, E. Phillips Oppenheim, Edgar Wallace, Mignon G. Eberhart, Hugh Walpole, Q. Patrick, Cornell Woolrich, G. K. Chesterton, Hugh Pentecost, Leslie Ford, Arthur Conan Doyle, Thomas Walsh, MacKinlay Kantor, Rufus King, Peter Cheyney, George Fielding Eliot, Fredric Brown, Erskine Caldwell, and many, many others.

**KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, Inc.**

**320 Fifth Avenue, New York 1, New York**

Kindly send me the copies of THE SAINT whose issues I have circled below. One copy at 35¢, three copies at $1, six copies at $1.75, twelve copies at $3.25. I enclose $_____ in full payment—no additional charges for postage.

JUNE '53; AUG. '53; OCT. '53; JAN. '54; MAR. '54; MAY '54; JULY '54; SEPT. '54; OCT. '54; NOV. '54; DEC. '54; JAN. '55; FEB. '55; MAR. '55; APR. '55; MAY '55; JUNE '55; JULY '55; AUG. '55; SEPT. '55; OCT. '55 NOV. '55; DEC. '55; JAN. '56; FEB. '56; MAR. '56; APR. '56; MAY '56.

Name_____

Address_____

City, Zone, State_____

PLEASE PRINT SD 610

# THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

OCTOBER, 1956
VOL. 6, NO. 4

The Careful Terrorist . . . . . 4
*by LESLIE CHARTERIS*

Wings of Death . . . . . 24
*by CHRISTOPHER BUSH*

Adventure of the Trained Cormorant . . 37
*by AUGUST DERLETH*

The Day of the Cripples . . . . . 51
*by VINCENT STARRETT*

You Can't Depend on Anybody . . . . 67
*by PATRICIA HIGHSMITH*

Problem at Pollensa Bay . . . . . 84
*by AGATHA CHRISTIE*

Front-Page Cop . . . . . 98
*by LESLIE T. WHITE*

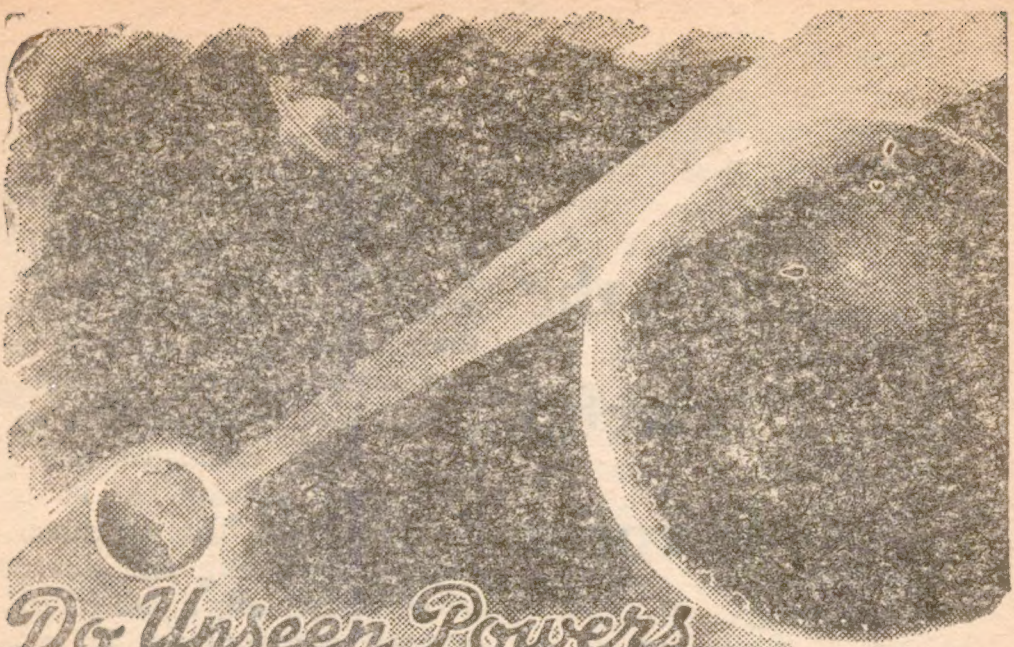
The Plaster Cat . . . . . 110
*by Q. PATRICK*

H. L. Herbert
*Publisher*

Hans Stefan Santesson
*Editorial Director*

Leslie Charteris
*Supervising Editor*

THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, Vol. 6, No. 4. Published monthly by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC., 320 Fifth Ave., N. Y. 1, N. Y. Subscription, 12 issues $3.75, single copies 35¢. Foreign postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter at the post office, N. Y., N. Y.
Characters in this magazine are entirely fictitious and have no relation to any person living or dead. © 1956, by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC. All rights reserved. OCT. 1956. PRINTED IN U.S.A.



# Do Unseen Powers Direct Our Lives?

ARE the tales of strange human powers false? Can the mysterious feats performed by the mystics of the Orient be explained away as only illusions? Is there an intangible bond with the universe beyond which draws mankind on? Does a mighty Cosmic intelligence from the reaches of space ebb and flow through the deep recesses of the mind, forming a river of wisdom which can carry men and women to the heights of personal achievement?

## Have You Had These Experiences?

. . . that unmistakable feeling that you have taken the wrong course of action, that you have violated some inner, unexpressed, better judgment? The sudden realization that the silent whisperings of self are cautioning you to keep your own counsel — not to speak words on the tip of your tongue in the presence of another. That something which pushes you forward when you hesitate, or restrains you when you are apt to make a wrong move.

These urges are the subtle *influence* which when understood and directed has made thousands of men and women masters of their lives. There IS a source of intelligence within you as natural as your senses of sight and hearing, and more dependable, which you are NOT using now! Challenge this statement! Dare the Rosicrucians to reveal the functions of this Cosmic mind and its great possibilities to you.

## Let This Free Book Explain

Take this infinite power into your partnership. You can use it in a rational and practical way without interference with your religious beliefs or personal affairs. The Rosicrucians, a world-wide philosophical movement, *invite* you to use the coupon below, now, today, and obtain a free copy of the fascinating book, "The Mastery of Life," which explains further.

Scribe W. Y. C.
THE ROSICRUCIANS, AMORC
San Jose, California

I am sincerely interested in knowing more about this unseen, vital power which can be used in acquiring the fullness and happiness of life. Please send me, without cost, the book, "The Mastery of Life," which tells how to receive this information.

*Name*.....

*Address*.....

**The ROSICRUCIANS**
**(AMORC)**

# the careful terrorist

by . . . Leslie Charteris

THE EXPLOSION that killed Lester Boyd blew out a couple of windows in his West Side apartment and narrowly missed some passers on the sidewalk below with a shower of falling glass; but otherwise its force was so accurately calculated that it endangered nobody but its intended victim. The apartments across the landing and directly overhead felt only a dull concussion, and a little plaster fell from a ceiling underneath; that was all. But all that was left of Lester Boyd was a gory pulp and the memory of a crusading journalist who had taken one dare too many.

Two days after it happened, Chief Inspector Fernack came striding out of the New York *Herald Tribune* by the back way on 40th Street, swung to his left, and collided with Simon Templar with a force that would have sent most men spinning. But the momentum of Fernack's rugged beef and bone was absorbed almost casually by a deceptively lean frame of spring steel and leather, and the Saint smiled and

**"I've killed people, but never anyone that the world wasn't a better place without. . . ."**

*ALL THAT WAS LEFT OF LESTER BOYD WAS A GORY PULP AND THE MEMORY OF A CRUSADING JOURNALIST WHO HAD TAKEN ONE DARE TOO MANY. . . . SIMON TEMPLAR, TO THE DISMAY OF CHIEF INSPECTOR FERNACK, DECIDES TO TAKE A HAND IN THE HUNT FOR FOR A TALENTED MURDERER—AND HIS EMPLOYER.*

said: "Why, John Henry, haven't you heard that it isn't supposed to be good for men of your age to gallop around like Boy Scouts on a treasure hunt?"

Fernack recognized him with delayed surprise, bit off the churlish execration which like any healthy New Yorker he was instinctively prepared to launch at any stranger who obstructed his own fevered shuttlings, and said almostly lamely: "Oh, it's you." Then, with renewed irascibility: "When did you get back in town? And what are you up to now?"

The Saint suppressed a sigh—just enough for it to be still irritatingly perceptible.

"Yesterday," he replied methodically. "And nothing. But I don't need to ask *you* silly questions, John Henry. I'm just an amateur detective—not a pampered civil servant. I observe that you're slightly overwrought. I see where you've come from." He glanced up at the grimy building beside them. "I read newspapers. I know that Lester Boyd worked here. I deduce that you're working on his murder, and that you're still trying to tag a Clue."

"Have you got one?" Fernack growled.

"I've got the price of a drink," Simon said. "You look as if you could use one—and why should we stand being jostled on a hot pavement outside Bleeck's when it's cooler and quieter inside?"

The detective offered only token resistance to being steered through the unpretentious door of the famous tavern. Simon found a sufficiently secluded space for them at one end of the age-mellowed bar, for they were still more than half an hour ahead of the vanguard of artists and writers and big and little wheels of the newspaper world who had given the place its name as their informal club and who by lunch time would have jam-packed it to the first of its two daily peaks of convivial frenzy. He ordered Dry Sack for himself and Peter Dawson on the rocks for Fernack; and under the soothing influence of the smooth Scotch nectar Fernack almost apologized, in a grudging and indirect way.

"This isn't just a routine case to me," he said. "I knew the guy. Some of the stuff he printed was what I told him. He was doing a good job."

Originally assigned to do a short series on the rackets that still flourished in a United States that had become progressively less conscious of them as they became more deeply embedded in the political and economic system, Lester Boyd had pursued his researches with such zeal and proficiency, and had written about them with such trenchant clarity and wit, that the initial articles had stretched out into a syndicated column which had

been running for more than six months with no diminution of reader interest when an expertly measured quantity of dynamite brought it to an abrupt conclusion.

The subjects of Boyd's investigations were not the illicit distillers and unlicensed gamblers and peddlers of forbidden pleasures, the violators of fairly simple laws which could be enforced by any moderately efficient police force with the ambition to do it. He pointed out that the victims of that group of malefactors were mostly eager customers by their own choice, or at best had been susceptible to relatively little coaxing to step off the straight and narrow path. The targets that he had made his specialty were the crooked union bosses and masterminds of devious extortion who defrauded and disfranchized the "working man" at the same time as they professed to be championing his cause, and who simultaneously used the threat of strikes and riots to saddle legitimate business with a hidden tax which, he argued, was eventually paid by almost every citizen in the form of the extra pennies which as a result had to be added to the majority of things that people buy.

This is such an ingeniously subtle and diffused form of blackmail, embezzlement, and larceny that most public prosecutors—to say nothing of the rank-and-file union members and the realistic business men on the other side of the table—had long since given up hope of any practical solution except to continue the payment of tribute and charge it off to modern overhead. But Lester Boyd's pertinacious studies had contrived to detail and document so many case histories and specific shakedowns that they had started a rumble of rising indignation across the land which the sensitive ears of its politicians could not ignore. And as a corollary, the parasites who saw their immunity and fat living menaced stopped sneering and began to snarl.

"He was warned to lay off," Fernack said. "He got messages stuffed in his mail box, phone calls in the middle of the night. Then a coupla goons were waiting outside his apartment building once when he came home, but the cop on the beat happened to come around the corner just as they started slugging him. After that I tried to make him call Headquarters whenever he was going any place where there wasn't bright lights and plenty of people, and we'd have a radio car cruise by and watch for him. Sometimes he'd do it and sometimes he wouldn't bother, but I made him have it put in the paper anyway and I figured it'd make those bastards think twice about trying to beat him up again. But he wouldn't lay off,

of course. So they laid him off."

"You know the characters he was attacking," Simon said. "Have you had any of them in and asked them questions?"

"Oh, sure, I've had 'em in. And asked 'em stupid questions. And got the stupid answers I deserved." The detective's voice was harsh with corrosive acid. "If you mean did I give 'em a good old-fashioned going over, you know damn well I didn't. You remember how in Prohibition nobody could lay a hand on a top gangster for all the shyster attorneys around him and the crooked politicians spreading their pocket handkerchiefs for him to walk on so's his shoes wouldn't get dusty? Well, these mugs make those old-time mobsters look like punks. They got twice as many lawyers and half the time they don't even bother with the politicians. These guys are legitimate—at least until somebody p r o v e s otherwise. They got fancy offices an' secretaries an' all the trimmings, just like the President of General Motors. They go to conventions an' banquets, and make speeches.

Suppose we caught some goon who beat somebody up, and maybe twisted his arm a bit till he named one of the bosses who hired him to do it? The boss would laugh at us. Just some over-enthusiastic union member trying to talk himself out of an assault rap, he'd say—and what other proof do we have?"

"Who would you use your rubber hose on if you could get away with it?" Simon asked, sympathetically, but with just enough hint of an underlying taunt to be sure of stinging Fernack out of any imminent reversion to the discreet habits of the clam. "Boyd was shooting at so many guys. Did he have anyone in his sights sharply enough to make himself an obvious murder risk?"

"Yeah. Just one guy, that I put him on the tail of. But what he dug up, after the lead I gave him, was all his own. He said it was hot enough that if it wouldn't get this guy at least five years in a Federal pen it could only be because the Attorney General was fixed. Anyway, he had somebody worried enough to want him bumped off."

"Where did he keep this information?"

"That's what I was up to the Syndicate office trying to find out. But they don't have it. Nobody seems to know where it is—unless, probably, it was all in his head. But it don't mean the same any more. Suppose anybody found it now, and this louse did draw a five-year stretch. That only pays for some of his past racketeering. The murder is still on the house." Fernack's big knuckles whitened around his glass in a contraction of coldly

suppressed fury that threatened to crush it like an eggshell. "There's only one way he's ever likely to be tied into that bombing, and that'd be if someone backed him up to a wall and beat a confession out of him. Which the judge would throw out anyhow. But I can remember a time when I'd of done it just the same, just for the satisfaction of seeing he didn't beat the rap without even getting his hair mussed."

"What's his name?" Simon persisted.

"Nat Grendel," Fernack said, almost defiantly. "You've heard of him."

The Saint nodded.

"I read Boyd's articles. But I didn't think Grandel would go all the way to murder."

"Some guys will go a long way to stay out of Leavenworth."

Simon lighted a cigarette.

"I never get enough exercise, in this effete city. How would you feel if I did some of the old-fashioned brutal things to Brother Grendel that they won't let you do, now that Centre Street has become so correct and maidenly?"

The detective glared at him in what anyone who had not followed their long acquaintance through all its vicissitudes would certainly have considered a disproportionately apoplectic reaction to such a friendly offer.

"You stay out of this! If somebody takes Nat Grendel for a ride, in the name of some kind o' justice above the Law, like you did to some other guys in this town once, I'll know it was you and I'll send you to the electric chair and I'll pull the switch myself, so help me. I got enough trouble already—and you can't get away with that stuff any more." He drained his glass violently, and added, with what seemed like a somewhat naive superfluity: "Anyhow, Grendel's only the guy who wanted Boyd wiped out. The guy whose trade marks were all over that bomb job is the Engineer."

In the underworld's roster of peculiar specialists, the man who was usually referred to as the Engineer was perhaps the most sinister and shadowy. The latter adjective is applicable to his reputation and *modus operandi* rather than to his physical aspect, which was anything but wraith-like.

His real name was Herman Uberlasch, and he had the bullet head, stolid features, and bovine build with which any cartoonist would have automatically endowed a character intended to represent a typical Teuton. A straggly mustache masked the ruthless line of a bear-trap mouth, and gold-rimmed glasses of unfashionable shape maintained a deceptive screen of gentle helplessness before his very pale blue eyes. Ostensibly he operated a watch, clock, and small appli-

ance repair shop on a shabby corner of Third Avenue; but his unsuspecting neighbors would have been amazed to see the figures on the income tax returns which he meticulously filed each year. To the inspectors, who were also amazed and slightly incredulous, he explained unblinkingly that he was sometimes paid quite fantastic fees for overhauling priceless antiques and heirlooms; and beyond that, since there was no evidence that he had been unwise enough to conceal any income, they had no authority to go.

But in more sophisticated circles, Herman Uberlasch was widely believed to have been the first practical joker to wire a bundle of dynamite and a detonator to the ignition system of a car in such a way that the next person attempting to start it would simultaneously eliminate both himself and his vehicle from the automobile market. That story may belong strictly to folklore. But even if there is any truth in it, he progressed rapidly to more complex and ingenious conceptions. He was more plausibly credited with inventing a cigarette lighter which could actually be lighted for demonstration purposes, but which exploded like a grenade when operated by anyone who did not know its secret; and there is no longer much doubt that he originated the prank of mounting a .45 cartridge inside a telephone receiver with such a cleverly sprung firing mechanism that as far as the victim was concerned its message literally went in one ear and out the other.

He had a solution for almost any problem that could be handdled mechanically, and he was always alert for ways to adapt the latest advances of science and technology to his work: when television came in, he was the first to think of fitting a picture tube with a special cathode that in one or two sessions would give its audience a dose of X-rays which would soon place them beyond the reach of the most insistent commercial.

It was for achievements thus unsung, or at least vocalized only in very limitedly choral society, that Uberlasch won his reputation as the Engineer; but as the time-honored and straightforward custom of taking troublesome individuals for a ride became somewhat outmoded or less practical, his unusual talents were increasingly in demand, and to his great disgust his name was bandied about among the cognoscenti, and a man who had heard that the Engineer had been assigned to him would scarcely dare to strike a match for fear that it might kindle his own funeral pyre. But still it was all only accepted rumor and furtive whisperings, for the Engineer himself never boasted, nor did his gad-

gets leave any evidence that could embarrass him.

If the police raided his humble premises (as one rash officer did once) he had the ideal legitimate justification for any springs, cogs, timing devices, electrical parts, tools or instruments that might be found there; the explosives never entered his shop, but were always added on the job at the last moment.

"It might be five or ten years before a combo like that makes a slip that would stick in court, Bill—if they ever make it," Simon argued. "I just want to speed up the odds."

This was after Fernack had refused another drink and departed for his office downtown, muttering further threats of what would happen if the Saint presumed to take the law into his own hands; and Simon had waited for the editor of the syndicate which Boyd had been working for, with whom he already had a date for lunch.

"I couldn't get away with setting you up to be shot at," was the answer. "Even if you talked me into it, my boss wouldn't let me go through with it."

"You could hire me to continue Boyd's column," Simon wheedled. "Any self-respecting newspaper should refuse to let itself be bullied into dropping this subject just because the goons have hit back once, and my reputation as an expert on skullduggery and dirty pool is certainly good enough to account for picking me to carry on. Then when you start publishing me, and I say in my first article that by an odd coincidence I was the little bird who told Boyd where to dig up the dirt that he was going to publish on Grendel, and that I'm just as qualified to go on raking it out—well, you could hardly refuse to print that, because for all you know it might be the truth. And then if anything unfortunate did happen to me as a result, nobody could blame you, because obviously I'd asked for it myself."

"But what you're thinking is that they'll have to try to give you something like the same treatment they gave Lester; but you're going to be fast enough to duck."

"And maybe catch them off base, too—if you don't mind how a metaphor gets mangled. You'd go a long way to see that somebody pays for Boyd's murder, wouldn't you?"

The editor rubbed his chin.

"I don't think Fernack is going to like this," he said.

"What we have to hope is that Nat and Herman like it even less," said the Saint.

Nat Grendel would have objected venomously to hearing it reported that he blew his top when the first article under Simon Templar's by-line was shown to him, for he prided him-

self on having risen above such vulgar displays, but he came frighteningly close to it.

In the course of a career professedly devoted to improving the status of the working man, Nat Grendel had improved nobody more than himself. Rising from origins as lowly as those of any of the toilers he claimed to represent, he had managed to transform himself into a fair facsimile of their own traditional bogey-man. Always impeccably barbered, groomed, and tailored, he looked as if he had never soiled his manicured fingers on any cruder tool than a fountain pen. Not for him was the rugged, raucous, homespun, back slapping pose of certain other labor leaders who were always trying to prove that inflated salaries and unlimited expense accounts had not made them feel any less spiritually akin to the common man whose cause they championed. Grendel always spoke softly, and moreover had taught himself to do it in the language and even a good imitation of the accents of education and breeding; and he comported himself with a reserved and worldly suavity which often exceeded that of the corporation executives with whom he had to negotiate. Yet by some paradox which a Freudian psychologist would not find totally baffling, he commanded the genuine loyalty of a full fourth of the members of the key union local which he dominated, and the steel talons inside his kid gloves were sharp enough to control the rest. Even some of the more conservative and constitutional modern hierarchy of union bosses secretly envied Grendel's unchallenged rule over his self-chosen province; and although the supreme councils of organized labor disclaimed and deplored his tactics, he was still far too powerful a figure to be disowned or even seriously disciplined.

At fifty, he had plenty of wavy hair of a distinguished gray, though his brows and the pencil-line of mustache which he cultivated were still jet black, and he was quite vain of his somewhat actorish and good looks and well-preserved figure. Along with the appearance, he had developed the tastes of a sybarite: he liked to dine in expensive restaurants, accompanied by showy if not scintillating young women, and his terrace apartment overlooking Central Park housed a collection of antiques which few of the tycoons he professionally sneered at would have been ashamed of.

The concluding paragraph of the Saint's first essay said:

> Those who still want to know the facts which the late Lester Boyd meant to publish will not be disappointed if they continue to watch this

space. But I don't want to put Nat Grendel out of his misery too quickly. I want him to sweat for a few days and lie awake for a few nights first. And meanwhile I am thinking of a few extra ways to make him unhappy which even Boyd couldn't have handled.

Grendel found this partly puzzling, but the text which preceded it was essentially ominous enough to make him acutely uneasy for about twenty hours.

The second article, however, did nothing but elaborate an assortment of generalities, and he began to feel his confidence rebuilding as he allowed himself to consider the possibility that the whole thing might be a hoax, or at best a very crude and hollow bluff.

Although when it seemed expedient Nat Grendel had employed enough gunmen, thugs, plug-uglies, pipe-wielders, rock-slingers, and brass-knuckle masseurs to make up a sizeable task force, he had contrived to hold himself so personally aloof from violence that he would have scorned the mere suggestion of maintaining a private bodyguard. And it is an interesting fact that he had never had any occasion to doubt the wisdom of that arrogant economy until the third morning after Simon Templar had finagled himself a short-term mortgage on the Fourth Estate.

When his Puerto Rican houseboy announced the visitor, Grendel was examining a china lion-dog figurine of the Yin dynasty which had reached him through the mail only that morning. *"This is one of a pair my grandfather brought back from Shanghai,"* said the letter enclosed in the parcel, from an address in Buffalo. *"A dealer has offered $100 for them, and we could use the money, bu. I don't know if it is a fair price. I have read where you are a collector yourself and I know you would always help one of your union men not to get gypped whatever the papers say, so please tell me if I should take it."* Grendel was still far from being an expert himself, but he knew that if the figures were fakes no dealer would pay $10 for them, but if he would pay $100 they must be worth many times that amount. Grendel was trying to distract himself from his major anxiety by deliberating whether in the circumstances $125 or $150 would be the ideal offer for him to make on his own account —the object being to seem magnanimous without encouraging his follower to try for more competitive bids—and his first reaction when he heard the name "Templar" was to be so incensed by the effrontery that he forgot to be afraid.

"Send him in," he snapped; and as soon as the Saint entered

he went on in the same tone: "You've got a nerve thinking you could just drop in and get an interview from me, after the lies you've already printed!"

Simon shook his head gently.

"I'm not a bit interested in anything you're likely to tell me. And I'm not here to ask if you'd care to buy me off, as you may have been thinking. I just came to keep the promise I published and bring a little personal woe into your life, in case you hadn't decided yet whether to take me seriously."

By that time the houseboy had withdrawn, closing the door after him, and Grendel's first physical qualm came a little late.

The Saint was surveying the decorations and ornaments with elaborate and unblushing curiosity.

"You've come a long way, Nat," he remarked. "If only you'd picked up some honesty along with the other cultural trimmings, you'd be quite a success story."

"Listen to who's talking," Grendel jeered.

For an instant the Saint's eyes were like sword-points of sapphire.

"Don't ever get one thing wrong," he said. "I never robbed anyone who wasn't a thief or a blackguard, although they might have been clever enough to stay within the law. I've killed people too, but never anyone that the world wasn't a better place without. Sometimes people seem to forget it, since I got to be too well known and had to give up some of the simple methods I used to get away with when I was more anonymous, but my name used to stand for a kind of justice, and I haven't changed."

"If that's how you feel, you shouldn't be picking on me," Grendel said automatically, and was even angrier to hear how hollow it sounded.

"You are a parasite and an extortioner, among other things, and you've had dozens of men beaten and maimed for obstructing your chosen escalator to a penthouse," said the Saint dispassionately. "But an ordinary judge and jury might have cut you back to size eventually. Only the man who seemed most likely to help that happen was conveniently blown away, and a friend of mine who knows his onions thinks that whatever happens now on the other counts you're a cinch to literally get away with murder. So for old times' sake, I decided I should do something about it."

He smiled again, with renewed geniality, and sauntered across to a glass cabinet which obviously enshrined some of Grendel's most fragile treasures. He opened the door calmly, and with unerring instinct lifted out a delicate vase from the central position on an upper shelf.

"This is a nice piece, isn't it?" he murmured. "I bet it cost you plenty of skimmings off the union dues."

"That's none of your business. Be careful—"

"It would be a crime to destroy it, wouldn't it? But is it quite such a crime as destroying a man, wantonly, for no better reason than that he might have told the truth about you?"

"Put that down," Grendel said savagely, starting across the room, "and get out of here—"

Simon Templar put down the vase, sadly and very seriously, but none the less firmly, as an executioner might have swung down a switch that sent a lethal voltage into an electric chair, crisply and positively, on the edge of the nearest table, with an unflinching force that shattered it into a shower of fragments.

In a white paroxysm into which no other goad could have stung him, Grendel sprang forward into a collision course with an orbiting set of knuckles which he intercepted with his right eye.

He reeled and swung wildly, contacting nothing but thin air; and another wickedly accurate fist jarred his teeth sickeningly and sent him staggering back to collapse ignominiously in an armchair which caught him behind the knees.

The Saint sat on the edge of a table and lighted a cigarette.

"You'd better relax, Nat, before something permanent happens to your beauty."

Dabbing a silk handkerchief on his bloody lips, Grendel spat out some crude words that he had not used for fifteen years. But pain and shock had already quenched his momentary flare of violence. Outside of that instant of uncontrollable madness he would never have exposed himself to physical conflict at all, for he had neither the muscles nor the spirit for personal combat. Now the awareness of his abject impotence at the hands of the Saint was linked with the bitter memory of other half-buried humiliations suffered in his youth, before he learned more devious ways of fighting; and the mocking eyes of the contemptuously buccaneer gazing speculatively at him seemed to know it.

"I wonder what you'll do now, Nat? You could call the police and charge me with assault, or call your lawyer and sue me. But if I said I was only trying to interview you, and you went berserk and knocked that vase out of my hand when you took a poke at me, and I had to smack you a couple of times to cool you down in self-defense—it'd only be your word against mine, and you might have a tough time selling it."

"I'll get you for this, don't worry!"

"With one of your goon

squads? But you'll never get the same satisfaction out of hearing what they did to me as I've had out of slapping you with my own hands. I suppose if they were good enough to kidnap me they might be able to hold me while you beat me. But that wouldn't be so good for you, because you'd be proving in front of your own men that you were a white-livered punk who couldn't lick anyone that didn't have his hands tied behind him, and they mightn't forget it. Besides, beating me up isn't enough. I've got to be killed; or else I give you my word I'm going to send you to jail as surely as Lester Boyd would have. And you wouldn't have the nerve to kill anyone yourself even if he was trussed up like a mummy."

"You'll find out," Grendel said.

Simon contemplated him skeptically.

"You'll probably end up just farming the job out as usual," he said. "The whole trouble is, you're yellow. Even if the Engineer could set me up with some radio-controlled bomb that you could fire from here without the slightest risk that it could ever be proved you did it, I don't think you'd have the guts to press the button. You've made yourself into a little two-bit czar, but you'll never find out what it feels like to play God."

He stubbed out his cigarette, most deliberately, on the beautifully polished table-top, and slid himself lazily off it to straighten up on his feet.

"I'll leave you to brood about it," he said lightly. "But don't brood too long, because in a day or two I may drop by again and do something else horrible. And I've got plenty more printable things to write about you." He paused at the door. "Any time you've got a few husky friends with you and feel brave, you don't have to waste a lot of time looking for me. I'm staying at the Algonquin."

Herman Uberlasch felt phlegmatically confident that he had nothing to apologize for in the bomb that had silenced Lester Boyd—although it was one of his less intricate contraptions, it had been entirely adequate for the job, and the conscientious craftsmanship that went into it was evidenced by the fact that it had admittedly hurt no extraneous characters whose injury might have beclouded the issue and unnecessarily increased the volume of public indignation.

Therefore he was somewhat puzzled by the curt and rancorous tone of voice in which Grendel phoned him a few days afterwards and summoned him to another conference. But he went, because Grendel was an old established client and never haggled over a fee, and when he got there he could see very plainly

why his customer was emotionally distraught.

"Dot iss a beautiful shiner you got, Nat," he commented tactlessly, in the accent which he had guarded as an artistic flourish rather than from any linguistic disability. "Und der schvelling of der mouth also. I didn't know it vos so true vot I read in der paper."

The Saint's latest article had begun:

> The reason why Nat Grendel, the tapeworm of organized labor, will not be sampling the caviar in his favorite haunts for a few days is that he is ashamed to show his face in public. Not, I regret to say, on account of the things I've been saying about him here, but simply because of some inglorious contusions inflicted on it by the rude hands of an unidentified person who may have felt he was paying an interim dividend on the late Lester Boyd's account.

"Never mind about that," Grendel said coldly. "I want you to do something about Templar."

"Chust like Boyd, perhaps? A liddle machine dot goes off ven he schvitches on der lights? Dot iss a good, simple, reliable system mit no bugs in it. Or do you vant dis vun to be different?"

"I've got a crazy idea—I'd like to pull the trigger on this myself. Would it be possible to rig something that could be fired by radio, for instance? So I could wait till I got him on the phone and tell him what I was doing, and then press a button and even hear it go off."

The Engineer's torpid face lighted up.

"You should've been a clairvoyant, Nat. You ask for der very latest idea I been working on. Only a few days ago a feller comes in my shop mit a model airplane for me to repair, und it has radio controls so he can fly it he says two miles avay. Now you know how I'm alvays looking for new ideas to improve my service, so of course I see at vunce how dis could be exactly vot I'd need some day to schtart a fire or set off a special bomb, und naturally I find out vhere he gets it und I put it in schtock. Dis vill be so interesting I vould almost do it for nodding—only dot vould be unprofessional," he added hastily.

"How long will it take you to get it working?" Grendel asked. "This can't wait for weeks while you're experimenting."

"Der experimenting iss already done. I vould not be talking about it if I hadn't proved I could make it vork. Der bomb I can haf ready tomorrow. Vhere iss Templar living?"

"At the Algonquin."

Uberlasch frowned.

"To plant der bomb may not

be easy. It iss a schmall hotel vhere everybody iss known und everybody iss noticed. Und I suppose Templar iss no fool, und he vill be looking out for somebody trying to take care of him like Boyd."

"Up to a point, yes. But he's so damned sure of himself that he doesn't seriously believe it could happen to him. The more I've thought about it, the more I'm convinced that he thinks he can bluff me out of making anything happen to him because it's too soon after what happened to Boyd. So I'm betting it'll be easier than you expect."

"I alvays giff you top marks for psychology, Nat. Maybe you got der answer right dere." The Engineer scratched thoughtfully at his benevolent walrus whiskers. "Now perhaps ve cash in on his blind schpot like dis . . ."

In a room only a few floors less lofty in an adjacent hotel, where he had registered under a new and utterly implausible name, Simon Templar presently took off the earphones and switched off the sensitive radio receiver which had brought him every word of the conversation.

Nat Grendel also had his blind spot. Like any other man involved in sometimes highly questionable stratagems, he was acutely sensitive to the risk that someone might try to install an eavesdropping device in his apartment, and his loyal and conscientious servant had standing orders which would have made it virtually impossible for anyone to gain admission and be left alone on any pretext even for a moment. But it had not occurred to Grendel, who did not have the Engineer's turn of mind, that a Chinese ornament credibly sent to him by a trustful member of his union could have sealed into it a microphone and miniature radio transmitter capable of broadcasting for a more than sufficient two hundred yards.

Grendel placed the lion-dog temporarily on top of the cabinet which the Saint had vandalized, and wrote a letter to Buffalo which he thought neatly solved his dilemma.

*"I'm not an expert valuer,"* he wrote, *"but I do know that antique dealers expect to make a profit. Let me see if I can help you to share in it. I'm sending you herewith $100—all that the dealer would have given you—to tide you over your immediate emergency. Send me the other figure, and let me get an offer for the pair. Perhaps I can get a slightly better bid than you could, from some dealer who owes me a favor, and if so I'll send you the difference."*

In this way he would have both pieces in his possession, there would be no danger of the owner getting an embarrassingly different valuation, and in a short while an additional check for

perhaps $15 would secure him an even more grateful and devoted disciple.

For the protective function performed by Grendel's houseboy, Simon Templar was able to rely to a large extent on the voluntary devotion of a large part of the Algonquin staff, some of whom had known him for so many years that they took an almost proprietary interest in his welfare. When he returned to the hotel the following afternoon from typing and handing in his column at the newspaper syndicate office, a bellboy stepped into the elevator with him, exchanged a polite greeting and some innocuous comments on the weather, got out at the same floor, and trailed him unobtrusively to his suite.

"There was a man here while you were out, sir, supposed to be from the telephone company," he said when they were alone. "I got the job of letting him in with the pass key and staying here while he worked, you know, like the hotel always has somebody do. It was some complaint about the phone not always ringing, he said. He fiddled about a bit and fastened something on the wire, under the bed, but he said that was only temporary and he'd take it away when he brought a new bell unit. I thought you'd like to know, sir."

The bellhop showed him the attachment on the wire, and Simon removed it and examined it cautiously. It was a small but very efficient w re recorder, as he pointed out.

"You might as well take it home and have some fun with it," he said. "Or any shop that deals in secondhand recorders should pay a fairly good price for it. If that bogus telephone man comes back and finds it's gone, I promise you he won't even let out a peep."

The bellboy grinned.

"Thank *you,* Mr. Templar. And I hope nobody ever gets the drop on you."

"Keep your fingers crossed for me," said the Saint piously, "and your eyes open."

As soon as his self-appointed sentinel had gone he made a further search, and did not take long to find the second memento left by his visitor. This was a plastic box about the size of a couple of cigarette packages, and it was fastened to the under side of the telephone table with a gooey adhesive. Obviously it had been prepared so that all the operator had to do was distract the bellhop's attention for an instant, strip off a protective covering, and press the sticky side of the box up against the wood, where it would cling without any other fastening.

It was not hard to detach, but he handled it very gingerly, knowing what it contained.

He could look back on many

minutes of agonizing suspense in the course of his life, but none that were more icily nerve-racking than those that he spent before he was sure that he had rendered the Engineer's newest masterpiece harmless.

Even after that he felt tense as he went back downstairs with a small valise which he had already packed, and told the desk clerk that he would be away overnight, and made an especial point of asking for the switchboard to be notified to give that message to any telephone callers. Not until his taxi had pulled away from the door, cutting him off from any chance of being prematurely contacted by Grendel, did he draw a completely r e l a x e d breath.

He did not, however, go out of town, but before they had r e a c h e d Fifth Avenue he changed the directions which the doorman had relayed to the driver, from the Air Terminal to the other hotel where he had set up his listening post; and it was from there that he called Fernack the next day and invited the detective to meet him for a drink at the Algonquin at 5:30 that evening.

"What's the idea now?" Fernack asked suspiciously. "Are you thinking you can con me into giving you the same leads I gave Boyd, so you can keep up your newspaper career?"

"Don't be late," said the Saint. "And have a police car waiting for you outside—you may need it."

"This had better be good," Fernack grumbled. "I read all your articles, because I gotta, but I'm gettin' a hunch tha. you're full of spit. If I was Grendel, you'd worry me a bit less every day."

Inspector Fernack's misjudgment could be excused, for he lacked the inside information which gave Grendel's appreciation of the Saint's literary output a pecuiiar piquancy, right up to and including the opening lines of the column which had appeared that morning:

> I sincerely hope that none of the home truths I have been expounding here recently will be taken as an attack on the those honest union leaders whose efforts have eliminated so many abuses and raise the living standards of every employee and through him of all Americans, without excessively feathering their own nests.
>
> A type like Nat Grendel, my current nominee for the Ignobel Prize, is actually a thorn in the side of every intelligent member of the labor movement, from the national leaders down to the lowliest dues-payer; but some of the suckers who give him their allegiance should see how his nest is feathered.

I made it my duty to case this joint recently, and I will testify that in one glass case alone I saw an assortment of bric-à-brac which even in my amateur estimation would be worth about 20 years' work at union scale with no taxes; while on his desk, freshly unwrapped, I saw what looked like his latest acquisition—a hunk of Oriental pottery which a consultant has identified from my description as a Yin dynasty lion-dog worth as much as Mr. Grendel's average constituent (if I may use the expression) would spend on a couple of years' mortgage payments . . .

Nat Grendel was still chewing a thumbnail over that sentence when Uberlasch arrived late in the afternoon. The matching china figure to the one the Saint had referred to had arrived earlier, by express, with a letter of effusive thankfulness enclosed; and Grendel had been unable to resist unpacking it and setting it on his desk beside its mate, the better to admire their symmetry.

Now he might end up having to pay something like a reasonable market price for the pair, if he wanted to keep them, unless he could think of some foolproof way of double-talking around those gratuitous observations which his faithful fan might just have been cussed enough to read. The probability inflamed all over again a complex of wounds of which his facial inflammations were now only dwindling shadows.

"How many do you vant of dose china nightmares, Nat?" wondered Uberlasch, whose faded eyes missed very little. "Now for halt der price I could make you a dog dot vags his tail und barks und eats only flashlight batteries. Dot iss, if it's schtill true vot I read in der papers."

"The only thing I want to read in the papers tomorrow," Grendel said edgily, "is how this precious radio gadget of yours worked."

The other put down the untidy brown-paper parcel he carried on the desk and opened it. When exposed, its contents were contrastingly compact and tidy.

"Here iss der transchmitter, Nat. It iss already tuned mit der bomb. Here iss der button. Ven it iss time for you, you pusch mit der finger. Dot iss all. You could've had it last night, und by now it vould be all over."

"Templar went somewhere out of town yesterday, I found out from his hotel. That's why I told you not to hurry. But he's due back any time now. All I want is to be sure everything's jake with the thing you planted."

The Engineer sat down comfortably and lighted a rank cigar.

"If it ain't, I should be blown up mit it myself," he said. "I'm not der great psychologist like you, but dot bomb vos put in mit a psychology of genius."

Simon Templar himself was ready to concede that, with the generosity of one true artist towards another. He admitted as much to Chief Inspector Fernack, in his living-room at the Algonquin, while he poured Old Curio over the ice cubes in two glasses.

"I honestly don't know how many times I might have been a sucker for a switch like that," he said. "They knew, of course, that the odds were about twenty to one I'd hear about any trick they used to get into my room, so they deliberately used one of the corniest routines in the book to make the bet even safer. Perhaps they overdid it a bit in actually showing the bellhop the gizzmo on the telephone wire. But I was supposed to feel so smug about finding it that I wouldn't think I needed to search any farther. And I just possibly might have, if I hadn't had electronic insurance."

"But the bomb, man," fumed the detective, too agitated about fundamentals to notice the last cryptic phrase. "Why didn't you keep it, or bring it to me? That'd be the kind of evidence—"

"Of what?"

"Any part that's used in a bomb can be traced, especially before it's blown up."

"Did you ever tie anything to the Engineer that way?"

Fernack gulped.

"Somebody was in your room, impersonating a telephone service man. The bellhop could identify him—"

"If he lived to do it. The guy did me a favo.. But after what they did to Boyd, and what they had planned for me, can you see me asking him to stick his neck out like that?"

"If he identified the Engineer, I'd have that Dutchman locked up so tight that even Grendel couldn't spring him."

"You might, but I doubt it. But even if you did, do you think you'd ever make Uberlasch say who hired him? Just on a point of pig-headed Prussian pride, you couldn't open his mouth with redhot crowbars, and if you think you know better you're only kidding yourself."

"If we don't keep trying," Fernack said stubbornly, "what's ever going to stop Grendel?"

"I had a suggestion once, but you didn't like it."

The detective looked up grimly.

"I still don't."

"Let's put it this way," said the Saint. "Grendel and the Engineer are guilty as hell: you know it, and I know it. But under the ordinary processes of law they don't seem any nearer to getting their comeuppance. However, it's an ancient legal doc-

trine that if anyone injures himself in an attempt to commit a crime, it's strictly his own fault. For instance, if we were standing on the edge of a cliff, and you suddenly tried to shove me over, and I dodged, so that you lost your balance and fell over yourself, it couldn't be blamed on me for not standing still and letting you push me."

"So what?"

Simon sipped his drink placidly.

"In the same way, if Grendel was fooling around with some nasty little toy that was intended to blow me to blazes, and instead it went off and disintegrated him—it'd be practically suicide, wouldn't it?"

"What are you driving at?" rasped Fernack distrustfully. "You didn't get me up here just for an argument."

"No," Simon admitted. "I also thought you might ask me for an alibi, and I couldn't think of a better one I could give you than yourself. For the rest, I'm betting everything on psychology. I know that Grendel fancies himself as the sharpshooter in that department, but I think I've got him out-psychologized—or maybe Buffaloed would be a better word," he said enigmatically.

And then, as if on cue, the telephone rang.

"That should be Grendel now," said the Saint, putting down his glass. "Come and listen."

He led the way into the bedroom, and Fernack followed him in glowering uncertainty. Simon lifted the handset and said: "Hullo."

"Templar?"

"Speaking." Simon turned the receiver away from his ear and beckoned Fernack closer so that the other could also hear.

"This is Nat Grendel."

"Well. How are your bruises? They should be sporting some beautiful color effects by now."

"Do you remember saying that if I had you sitting on a bomb you didn't believe I'd have the guts to set it off myself?"

"Yes."

"I'm going to show you how wrong you were."

"Don't try it, Nat," said the Saint soberly. "I can't give you a fairer warning than that."

"This isn't a warning," Grendel said. "I'm going to kill you, you bastard. But right now. I just wanted to tell you about it, so that the last thing you know will be that I'm doing it myself. Now."

Simon prudently moved the receiver a little further from his ear; but the detective, who was caught unprepared, jumped at the loudness of the *clack* that came from the diaphragm.

"What was that?"

Simon Templar listened a moment longer, to nothing, and

then quietly put down the phone.

"That was the accident I was talking about. I got the idea from Shakespeare. You remember that line about *'the Engineer hoist with his own petard'?* You didn't ask me how I got rid of the petard that they fixed for me. I suppose it was rather naughty, but the only thing I could think of was to put it inside a piece of china that he was interested in and send it back to him. It wouldn't 've hurt him if he hadn't pressed the button." The Saint went back into the living room and finished his drink. "Well, I guess we'd better get in that car I told you to have waiting and go see how much mess it made."

---

## I REMEMBER . . .

I remember — Oh, I remember so well the last time I saw my beautiful Paris. . . . It was snowing, and colder than usual I suppose, but the streets were crowded, ragged mercenaries jostling honest burghers, bright-eyed young ladies of varied reputations smiling hopefully at both jostler and jostled. "Blind" Pierre, Auguste le Bon—named so for somewhat less than Christian reasons, and I, huddled in the shadows, cursing the cold, cursing the snow, cursing the lack of sous for good red wine, cursing the outriders of the Cardinal as they rode through the crowd, scattering all aside with shouts, "Make way for My Lord the Cardinal."

This was when Auguste muttered the glorious idea to the rest of us, and glorious it was. Blessed be the rich who be given a chance to share with the poor. . . . It was well known that My Lord the Cardinal distrusted those foreign-owned establishments where you may leave your moneys in the care of others. A servant of My Lord Cardinal's had told Auguste, only the other night, just where the money was hid. . . . His eyes had glittered with hunger as he stammered it out, Auguste perhaps assisting in the telling just a little. . . .

I am afraid it was all a terrible mistake. We should never have believed the scoundrel. Or perhaps the gold *had* been moved as the thin-lipped secretary to My Lord the Cardinal informed us just before he signalled to the waiting mercenaries. . . . They would treat me differently, out of respect for my scribblings, the secretary said with a cold, pale smile. There was to be no blessed release in Death. I was to simply remain here, chained to the wall, some distance away from the narrow slit in the outer wall, watching the sun as it visited me for a while each morning, while I waited. . . .

FRANCOIS VILLON

# wings of death

*by . . . Christopher Bush*

**Ludovic Travers discovers why the donkey had wings. . . . . .**

IT WAS A morning in late November when Frank Lobell, the picture-dealer, rang me. He's a friend of long standing. I don't like to impose on his generosity but occasionally I accompany him to Christie's or Sotheby's when a big picture sale is in. It's a good way to learn about fashion trends and values, not that I'm anything more than an amateur. I can rarely afford to buy except when Frank tips me off to a bargain. But that morning he was tipping me off about something very different.

"A Frenchman had just left here," he said. "A Monsieur Jules Perlot. I gathered he was writing a new appreciation of Maurice Moulin. He was also interested, by the way, in Henri Larne. I hadn't a Moulin to show him—who has these days?—but I mentioned your name. He'll probably be ringing you about coming to see that one of yours. I hope you don't mind."

"Not a bit," I said. "One's always glad to show one's perspicuity. Is he also a buyer?"

"Don't think so, Ludo. You're not wanting to sell, are you?"

---

*You might say that Larne was now the painter that his uncle, Maurice Moulin, might have been if the drink hadn't killed him. What was the secret of Henri Larné's fantastic rise to fame? Ludovic Travers, that quietly British observer of the more deadly habits of the better classes stumbles into murder in this story of how too scholarly an interest in the arts can be dangerous.*

---

"Don't have hopes," I said. "That Moulin is one of the insurances against my old age."

He chuckled.

"Ah, well, there's nothing like trying. But tell me what you make of him, will you. I'll be interested."

Within a quarter of an hour Perlot himself was ringing and soon after that he arrived. His English was far from good so we talked in a mixture of two languages which I shall make no attempt to reproduce. He was a man in the early sixties and the imperial he wore made him the very image of Louis Napoleon. It was clear from the very first that he was uncommonly knowledgable.

My Moulin was of average size, not dated but signed as usual with an M in the bottom right-hand corner. The subject was simple, like everything that I had seen of Moulin's work—just an old man reading a newspaper, a bottle of wine and a half-filled glass on the table at his side. Perlot asked when I'd acquired it, and I said it was years ago when Moulin was unknown. I'd liked it and had bought it for almost a song.

"A fine example of his early work," he said, and drew back for another look. Then he took a glass from his pocket and examined the brush-work. I asked him what he was smiling at.

"Because it is a pleasure to see an unknown Moulin," he told me. "And so early a one. Later, as you know, he concentrated more on the still life in his pictures."

In the professional way with thumb and forefinger he indicated this passage and that and what Moulin would have made of it in his later years: the figure more withdrawn, the bottle and glass more in the foreground and various changes of light. He gave me almost a perky look as he explained that it was the kind of thing that Henri Larne, for instance, was painting at the moment.

"You are interested also in Larne?" I said.

"But certainly. Larne is in some ways merely a continuation of Moulin. It is necessary to be aware of Larne when writing a critical appreciation of Moulin. That is why one has also to be a detective."

I must have looked rather startled. He smiled.

"Not a detective of the police. But one has to probe. To try to unearth facts."

"Don't think me rude," I said, "but aren't the facts all known about Moulin? Haven't there been other biographies?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"There are always new facts if one looks for them." He gave himself an appreciative nod. "One digs and one discovers. This morning, for instance, I

discover a Moulin. Tomorrow, who knows. But this picture, m'sieur. At what do you value it?"

"You're the expert," I said. "What's your valuation?"

He said a thousand pounds or possibly more. When I said I didn't wish to sell, he seemed to think me unwise. Moulin's prices were going down. He asked if I had a photograph of the picture and said that if I'd have one taken he'd pay all expenses. He was returning to Paris the next day but he gave me a warm invitation to call on him when next I happened to be there. He gave me his card —Jules Perlot, 3 rue Colignot, St. Sulpice.

I was accompanying him to the lift when he suddenly asked another question.

"How foolish of me not to have asked before. It is possible that you also own a Larne?"

"No," I said. "I didn't have the luck or foresight to pick up a Larne before he also was known. And I know very little about him. I *have* seen the example in the Tate Gallery. You know it, of course."

"Oh, yes," he said, and I couldn't help thinking there was something ironic about his smile.

I'd nothing particular to do that cold afternoon, so I went to the Tate and had another look at that Larne. Then I dropped in on Frank Lobell. I told him where I'd been, and why. I added that it was amazing how quickly one could become aware of one's ignorance. I, for instance, knew practically nothing of Henri Larne. I'd been able to contribute nothing when Perlot had begun a comparison between Larne and Moulin. Frank had to laugh.

"It's all very simple," he said. "Henri Larne is the nephew of Maurice Moulin. Larne learned a lot from him before Moulin began drinking himself to death. You might say that Larne is now the very painter that his uncle might have been if the drink hadn't killed him. Moulin had quite a lot of the Gauguin in him, if I may put it that way."

"How long's he been dead?"

"Four years—five. In some hovel in Algiers."

"And that signature of Larne's—the Whistler's butterfly sort of thing he signs his pictures with. Looks like a donkey with wings. It isn't a cynical imitation of Whistler?"

"Oh, no," he said. "It's a pun on his own name. Larne and *l'âne*—the French for donkey as you know. Larne's father was Irish and his mother French, not that that's anything much to do with it."

"Yes, but why has the donkey got wings?"

"Ah!" he said. "That's the cynical part of it. Larne's said to have given the answer himself.

You see he was like his uncle, absolutely unknown for a very long time. It was the dealers who finally took him up, not the critics. The critics called him an ass, in so many words. 'Perhaps I was an ass,' Larne is supposed to have said. 'Perhaps I am still an ass, but a different sort of ass —an ass with wings.' "

"Amusing, and Gallic," I said. "But tell me if I'm right about something. Are Perlot's ideas right, that Moulin is not likely to increase in value in spite of his rarity, and because Larne is really a kind of continuation?"

"Yes," Frank said. "I think Perlot's right. Larne's extraordinarily mature for a man of about forty. You might call him a much better Moulin. One of his pictures, by the way, made twelve thousand dollars in a recent sale in New York. If you'd ever like to call on him when you're in Paris I can always get you an introduction, or give you one."

Only a fortnight later I took him up on that. Business connected with the Broad Street Detective Agency was taking me to Paris and, as Norris, my manager, has no French, I was making the trip myself. In connection with the same business I was meeting an old friend, Lucien Gallois of the Sureté Générale. After our business was concluded we had dinner together at my hotel.

Gallois is an extremely well-informed man but I didn't know, till he let something slip, that he took an interest in art. He knew, for instance, quite a lot about Henri Larne. I'd thought of him as a kind of ascetic: a man with a whole life dedicated to his art.

"Ah, no," Gallois said. "Painters no longer die in garrets, my friend. This Larne must make enormous sums, but he also spends. One sees him at fashionable restaurants, at receptions, at the races. He is a figure of importance." He shrugged his broad shoulders. "And why not? He is a bachelor. If he needs money he has only to paint another picture."

Before we parted he was wondering if there was a chance of his accompanying me on the visit I was paying to Larne's studio the following afternoon. I said I'd be delighted to take him and then he smiled somewhat wryly. People looked askance at inspectors of police. And what could one like himself be expected to know about art?

"You come with me," I said. "I'll explain you as a friend who's interested in an amateur way. You'd better get hold of a book on him, and read it. We'll think up some business from which you're supposed to have retired, and you might hint that

you're thinking of becoming a collector in a small way."

So that was why he went with me to Larne's house the next afternoon. The appointment was for half-past four—Larne had apologized over the telephone for not being able to spare me more than half an hour. The house and studio were very near St. Sulpice, and that was highly convenient for me since I'd arranged to see Jules Perlot at six o'clock and to give him the photograph of my Moulin. I don't know if you know Paris but if you wish to go from St. Sulpice to Melun, you go due west for half a kilometre which brings you to the Seine. Then you turn sharp right and follow the river. Larne's house was another half-kilometre along the bank.

It was a three-storied building, somewhat apart and in moderately sized grounds that sloped down to the river. The large studio, glass-roofed to catch the full north light, was built on. A rather morose manservant admitted us, and we were glad to be inside, for out of doors that day it was damp and bitterly cold. A minute or two and we were taken through to the studio. Larne welcomed us with a charming courtesy. He merely glanced at Frank Lobell's letter of introduction, and was smiling as if at a happy memory. He was as handsome a man as I'd seen for many a day, and his English was as good as my own, though with a trace of the Irish accent of his father.

He asked what we'd drink. There seemed an abundant choice but when he added that he'd also some excellent whiskey, that—even if it was early in the evening for me—was what we all chose. As Gallois spoke English remarkably well, that was the language we used. Everything was comfortable and friendly, even if the studio itself was just a bit too warm.

One had to begin somewhere with talking about art, so I told Larne about Jules Perlot and the critical study he was writing about Maurice Moulin. Larne looked surprised.

"I wonder why he hasn't approached me? It seems very unusual. Or is he only just beginning this study of his?"

"I got the idea it was well advanced," I said. "And I gather he's already unearthed some new facts. He alluded to himself as a kind of detective, by the way. And he has a very high opinion of yourself. I don't know whether you'll regard it as flattery or as an insult, but he spoke of you as what your late uncle might have become but for—well, things."

Larne didn't look so pleased as he should have done.

"Who is this Perlot?" he

wanted to know. "What are his qualifications?"

I could only shrug my shoulders and tell him the very little that I knew, and all the time I was realizing that I'd dropped a brick. No artist likes it to be hinted that he's less than a celebrity in his own right. I was floundering a bit when Gallois came to the rescue.

"Is it too late for myself to become a collector, M. Larne? Forgive me, but is it possible, for instance, to find early pictures of your own that would not be too dear?"

"I'm afraid not," Larne said. "The critics were annoying me and I was foolish enough to make a gesture. I destroyed every picture I'd made." He smiled deprecatingly. "I don't think it was a great loss to posterity but I do know it gave me a determination. From that moment I really began to paint. What's more, the dealers began to notice me."

I'd noticed the sheet that was almost certainly covering a canvas on the large easel just beyond where we were seated, and that above it was some kind of overhead lighting, so I asked what he had in hand at the moment. He got to his feet at once.

"Only this," he said, and removed the dust sheet. "It's only in its very early stages, as you see. All the same, I think it'll be rather good. The Lazy Servant, the Idle Servant—something like that."

It wasn't hard to see what he meant. Bold lines in charcoal and chalks were an illustration to his brief descriptions. It was to be the interior of a farm kitchen by the light of an overhanging oil-lamp. The servant would be barely visible in the background, asleep in a chair; on the table the various vegetables she should have been preparing for the evening meal. Certain colors had already been touched in—the copper, for instance, of a foreground pan. I thought it would be a typical Larne: practically no deviation from classical perspective and line and yet with a sharp, intriguing modernity, and, as always, a unique brilliance of color.

I was saying how much I could foresee in it when there was a tap at the door. The manservant announced the arrival of the model. Larne glanced at his watch. I looked at mine and it was already five o'clock.

"*Alors, Pierre.*" He waved a hand, then turned to us. "I'm sorry, gentlemen, to bring your visit to so abrupt an end. Perhaps you may be able to come again."

The model came in. She was a girl of about twenty with an attractive Slavic face. She stood for a moment while Larne looked at her. He gave a nod.

"You are Élise Faure, and you come in place of Hortense."

She smiled at his smile. He waved at the curtained recess at the far end of the studio, and Gallois and I moved towards the door. Larne accompanied us to the outer door and we thanked him for his kindness in seeing us. He was deprecatingly charming about it and he told me to give his warmest regards to Frank Lobell.

"Well, back to work," Gallois told me. "Or maybe I should go home instead and recount the events of this afternoon to my daughter. She is an art student and will be impatient to hear everything about so famous a man. And you, my friend?"

I said I had best part of an hour to fill in before seeing Jules Perlot and that it wasn't worth leaving the St. Sulpice district now I was there. What I did was walk along the river to a café-restaurant I'd noticed on our way to Larne's house. I had a pot of the peculiar liquid the French call *thé*, and a couple of excellent cakes. Thus fortified I walked the rest of the way back to St. Sulpice itself and began looking for the rue Colignot and Perlot's *appartement*.

I'd thought it would be in an apartment house, but it wasn't: it was a self-contained flat above a small *épicerie* and a side entrance with a short flight on bare stairs led up to the landing. There was only one door at which to knock and, as I did so, I saw that the door was slightly ajar. I waited for a moment and then gently pushed the door more open. What little I could see of the room was in front of my nose: the rest was darkness.

It was like a cold douche. Perlot had assured me that he would be in at six o'clock. Then it struck me that he might be in some inner room and it wouldn't be too much of a liberty to call him. But first I felt for the light switch.

"M. Perlot!"

I didn't call a second time. I didn't need to. The sudden light had dazzled my eyes for a moment but what they were seeing now was a something on the floor. I stepped gingerly in. It was Jules Perlot who was lying there and from his back was protruding the handle of a knife.

It was another ten minutes before the Brigade Criminelle arrived. It took me quite a time to convince the *brigadier* in charge that he ought to ring Gallois, and, until Gallois came, I was kept out on the dim landing. Even when Gallois did arrive there was nothing I could do but tell him how I'd spent my hour and what I'd found on knocking at Perlot's door. A few minutes later I was allowed to go to my hotel. It was not till

after dinner that Gallois rang me there.

"Anyone could have walked up there," he said. "Nothing's been discovered at all unless it's something you can help us to prove. Wasn't Perlot writing a book?"

"I thought you knew that," I said. "He was well on the way with it."

"I just wanted confirmation," he told me. "The peculiar thing is that there was no manuscript in that apartment. No notes—nothing."

"Wouldn't there be a woman who cleans the apartment?"

"Yes, but she's not available at the moment. We'll be seeing her later."

"And what about Perlot himself?"

Perlot, he said, had been a professor at a famous École de Beaux Arts in the provinces but had retired two years ago on receiving a substantial legacy.

He told me he'd see me some time the next morning but it was just after lunch when he arrived at the hotel. There were no promising developments and what he was praying for was some kind of lead. One thing he was sure about—the manuscript. The woman who came daily to clean the apartment had seen it on the morning of Perlot's death on the table by his typewriter, and the table had also been littered with what might have been notes. She had always had strict orders never to touch that table.

"There then is the motive," Gallois said impressively. "Someone desired that manuscript. I asked myself who. Could it be a nephew of Maurice Moulin who was jealous of the fact that he had not been consulted? Might there be something in that manuscript that threw, shall we say, a certain bad light on himself?"

"Come, come," I said. "A man in Henri Larne's position committing murder!"

"All theories are good till they're proved wrong," he reminded me." Then he shrugged his shoulders. "And this one was wrong. Perlot was stabbed about half an hour before you arrived. At that time Larne was at work in his studio."

"He can prove it?"

"The model—that Élise Faure—proves it. Last night she was interrogated. She was posing for Larne from soon after we left till about seven o'clock."

"She wasn't by any chance his mistress? He couldn't have induced her to give false evidence?"

"No, my friend. She is not even one of his regular models. As you and I gathered, she was taking the place for that evening of a friend, a certain Hortense. We have seen her too and she confirms it."

There was nothing else I could suggest. I wished him good luck as we said good-bye—I was leaving by an afternoon plane—and asked him to let me know how the affair turned out. I promised too, that if anything helpful occurred to me I would let him know at once, either at the Sureté or his private address.

When I reached my flat that late afternoon I had another look at that Moulin of mine. Not only had it acquired a new interest but, as I told Bernice—my wife—something ought to be done in the matter of its insurance. Neither fire nor theft was particularly likely, but one never knew: so after the evening meal I wrote to the insurance company increasing the cover to £500. Perlot might have been desirous of pleasing me when he had talked of a thousand pounds, but five hundred seemed pretty good for something that had cost me only fifteen. That mention of the picture's value aroused Bernice's interest and she had a good look at it too.

"Why did Moulin sign his pictures with that curious sort of M?" she asked me. "It's so spread out that it's hardly like an M at all."

"An avoidance of the conventional," I said. "Just one artist's way of seeing an M."

I didn't think any more about that remark till some time later—the evening, to be exact, when the covering note had arrived from the insurance people. Also that morning I'd walked the few yards to Leicester Square and bought a couple of Paris newspapers. Neither had a single word about the *affaire Perlot,* and, since I'd had no word from Gallois, it seemed pretty certain that nothing in the way of clues had turned up since my return. An unsolved problem always gnaws at me like a nagging tooth and I didn't want this one to become an obsession. And another reason why I could hardly avoid it was that very Moulin on my wall, and the appreciative and yet exasperating way it would catch my eye every time I looked up.

In the half-hour the next morning between waking and rising I reviewed everything I knew about the murder of Jules Perlot, however remotely things might seem to be connected. The very last thing to which I came was Bernice's remark about Moulin's peculiar M, and that made me be at the Tate as soon as it was open, for maybe there'd be something peculiar also about that much stranger signature of Henri Larne. And there was! It brought with it the queerest of ideas and, when they crystallized, there was one so fantastic that—paradoxically enough—it just had to have in it some grain of truth. Had Gallois been told it he would have laughed and

taken it as some curious English joke. And yet I didn't know. In fact I took a chance and rang him.

"Travers here, Lucien. Anything more on the Perlot business?"

"Nothing," he said. "If only we could recover that manuscript we should have a clue. As it is we have nothing."

"Tell me something. I don't say it's going to help but did Moulin leave any pictures behind him at that place in Algeria where he died?"

"None," he said. "He died in absolute squalor. Larne went there to try to find him but he was already dead and buried."

Then suddenly I knew that I'd been viewing that idea of mine from the wrong end.

"All the same I think it might be worthwhile if I saw you," I said. "There's something that oughtn't be allowed to wait."

At once there was a stream of questions. All I would say was that I'd take the first available plane and that we'd look for answers when I saw him.

"Just one thing," I said. "I'll come straight to you at your office and I'd like you to have that model there—Élise Faure. We might have to do a further interrogation."

On the plane that afternoon and during the drive from the airport I had just enough time to think things out. But if the original theory had been fantastic, the one that was bringing me to Paris was fifty times more so. I made that clear to Gallois as soon as I was in his room. He smiled.

"I also have had such theories in my time. But this one, my friend: why do you regard it as fantastic?"

I said I'd tell him that—after we'd seen Élise Faure. He rang at once for her to be brought in. She was looking ill at ease: not, I guessed, from any feeling of guilt. After all, a second interrogation at the Sureté isn't exactly something to make one smile, especially when one has no idea of the further questions that will be asked. But I did manage to make her smile, and at the very outset when I told her that the French I spoke was, as she could already hear, a special brand of my own.

"And now, Élise. Tell us again everything, however trivial, that happened that afternoon when you arrived at the studio."

Nothing had happened, she said. She had put on the peasant dress and M. Larne had inspected it and her and set her in the exact pose. He'd extinguished the lights except a special one over the easel, and had put on the headlight. That was all. He had worked till about seven o'clock and then she had left.

"You were cold when you

arrived," I said. "It was very cold out of doors. M. Larne didn't by any chance give you something to warm you?"

"He did," she said. "That was why—" She broke off. A little red came to her pale cheeks. "I mean, after the brandy I felt warm."

"And the room was warm. Everything was comfortable when you'd taken up your pose."

She was looking uneasy again. I hoped I was on the right track.

"You were a lazy servant," I said. "You were supposed to be asleep in the chair." I smiled as I leaned forward. "Tell us, Élise. Is that why you went to sleep?"

The red flooded her face.

"Just tell me," I said. "No one shall ever know but ourselves."

"Very well," she said. "I did fall asleep. But there was only the dim light and I'm positive M. Larne didn't notice it." Her hands rose, and fell. "After all, I was supposed to be asleep. And I was tired. All the afternoon I had posed at the Atélier Bérand and I only took the job to oblige a friend, Hortense Rameau."

Gallois rang for her to be taken out. We were most grateful, he said, and would not keep her much longer. In any case her time would be paid for. But it was nervously that she went out. No sooner did the door close behind her than the fist of Gallois was thumping the table.

"So this Larne has no alibi!"

"Not if he drugged the brandy," I said. "Just enough of the drug—say one sleeping tablet—to send her to sleep soundly enough for him to leave the studio without her being aware of it. A bout of coughing would wake her when he came back. Twenty minutes would have been enough."

"Yes," he said. "But what is behind it all? Why did you ask about pictures in Algeria when there were no pictures?"

"Because of the flying donkey," I said, and reached for a sheet of paper. "Think first of the signature of Maurice Moulin. It's drawn like this—a slightly drunken M collapsing gently.

"And now look at the signature of Larne. We start with the M of Moulin, add two more legs, head, tail, body and finally wings—like this—

Gallois' eyes lighted. "My friend—I think you are right. We have a flying donkey here, the flying donkey of the distinguished Monsieur Larne. I always did have my doubts about him."

I had a vision of a flying donkey somewheres in the background, neighing softly its derision—or did flying donkeys neigh?

"Yes," he said. "I was wrong. Larne must have found some of his uncle's pictures after all. All

he's been doing is changing the signature and passing them off as his own. That's why Perlot was murdered. He'd begun to suspect it. He as good as told you so. And, though you didn't know it, you told Larne."

"No," I said. "Didn't I tell you I was going to suggest something utterly fantastic? There were no pictures, Lucien. And ask yourself these questions. Why did Larne live in that out-of-the-way, secluded old house when he might have had the finest studio apartment in Paris?"

"Why not?" he said. "But why are you so sure Moulin left no pictures?"

"Each would have been worth a lot of money, that's why. Larne could have sold them for what they were. But the pictures that Larne has been selling as his own are in everyone's opinion the kind of thing that Moulin might have painted if he'd lived. They're a culmination of the old Moulin. They show a progressive mastery."

He frowned. He didn't yet quite see it.

"This is the fantasy," I said. "Ask yourself two more questions. Who can prove that Moulin went to Algiers? Who can prove, except Larne, that it was Moulin who died there?"

He moistened his lips. Then he leaned forward and lifted the telephone receiver.

Our car was hurrying towards Larne's studio and Larne himself was on the way to the Sureté where Gallois had been most humble in requesting his presence in the matter of some help in identifying some stolen pictures. We left Gallois' two men in the car. The manservant, Pierre, opened the door but he didn't invite us to enter.

"I'm sorry, gentlemen, but M. Larne is out."

Gallois pushed his way past him.

"I know," he said. "And I have a warrant to search the house."

"To search the house?" He stared. "But why? Who are you?"

Gallois told him. Pierre stared again. Then he whipped round and was out of the door and into the dark. Gallois didn't even trouble to call to his men.

"Let him go," he said. "If we need him he'll be found."

We searched the house. A room on the top floor had its door locked and it took the strength of both of us to burst it open. Gallois reached for the light switch. In that almost bare room, its windows closely shuttered, an old, gray man was sleeping heavily on a low, camp bed. His open mouth showed gapped and yellow teeth. The bared, thin arms had the pricks of many needles.

"It is Moulin," Gallois said.

"They kept him here. They let him recover sufficiently to paint. Maybe they bribed him with drink. Then they drugged him again—the needle or his food. And when he'd finished a picture he'd insist on signing it. Not that it mattered if it pleased him. All Larne had to do was make a donkey that flew."

He drew the coarse blanket up to the sleeping man's chest again. We went down the stairs and Gallois called to his men. They were to remain and keep the house under observation. Pierre might decide, if he saw no lights, to risk coming back.

There was a telephone in the corridor and Gallois turned to it quickly.

"That you, Mercier? . . . Have an ambulance sent here at once. And a doctor . . . Larne still there? . . . Tell him I'm just coming. *But keep him there.* If necessary use force, but on no account is he to go. I'm holding you responsible."

He hung up. He turned towards me and there was an irony in his smile.

"You heard that, my friend? The donkey is safe in the stable. And this time he will grow no wings."

---

IN NEXT MONTH'S ISSUE OF *THE SAINT* —

NO, NOT LIKE YESTERDAY —
a new Malone novelet by CRAIG RICE

THE IMPECCABLE MR. DEVEREUX —
by LOUIS GOLDING

VERY, VERY DARK MINK —
by ELIZABETH SANXAY HOLDING

TOAST TO VICTORY —
by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

THE RESURRECTION OF FATHER BROWN —
by G. K. CHESTERTON

THE MAN WHO LIKED TOYS —
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

— ADDITIONAL REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD SUBSCRIBE TO AMERICA'S MOST EXCITING DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

# the adventure of the trained cormorant

*by . . . August Derleth*

"Ah, that is one of life's least ironies. . . ."

"IT HAS BEEN all of six months since I have seen a dog-cart in the streets of London," said my friend, Solar Pons, as we rounded a corner into Praed Street and bore down upon 7B, "and that one, if I mistake not, is the work of an unreconstructed individualist. I permit myself to hope it may be a harbinger of some little problem to break the monotony of our summer days."

The object of Pons' interest stood before the steps to our own quarters, and, as we drew near, I could appreciate more fully Pons' comment. The dog-cart was in itself a little masterpiece of brown and tan and grey-white wood of all kinds.

"Wrought by hand in its entirety," murmured Pons, his eyes gleaming. "And come from some distance, would you not say, Parker?"

"Mud on the wheels—chalk and dust—elementary," I said. "Folkestone—Dover?"

"Say, rather, beyond. The mud is a clay found in south

*August Derleth, in bringing us the adventures and the triumphs of that great investigator, Solar Pons—who flourished a generation after the great Holmes—has, understandably, been accused of sundry and obviously unmentionable literary sins by those who feel that here is heresy. It must be admitted that Solar Pons, and his brother Bancroft, will perhaps remind you of that even greater Titan of quieter days, but, be that as it may, we are happy to bring you another adventure of the great detective from the days, not so long ago, when the British people faced danger across the Channel.*

Kent, the chalk dust lies over it, and what surmounts both is the dust of London." Pons was bending over the dog-cart in close scrutiny, as he spoke. "Moreover, it has been driven here by a man with a peg leg, who carried a parcel of some kind strapped to the cart."

"His portmanteau," I suggested. "He is a sycophant come to London to take lodgings with us and study your methods."

"Ah, you are waggish this evening, Parker," said Pons, smiling. "No, it was not a portmanteau. I should venture to guess a crate, containing, if the evidence before one's eyes is not deceptive, a bird." He caught up a downy feather between thumb and forefinger from the dog-cart and released it into the gentle breeze which made its way down Praed Street.

"I am willing to concede the bird," I said. "But surely you can say more of our visitor than that he has a peg leg. I can see those markings very well for myself in the bottom of the cart."

"Ah, how familiarity does b r e e d contempt!" exclaimed Pons with a droll expression on his usually saturnine features. "I can say but little more, my dear fellow—save that our caller is a man past middle age, of some little weight, obviously a man of the sea, for his cart is the result of his o w n craftsmanship wrought upon what must have been for the most part driftwood, one might add, on venture, a stubborn, determined man who drives himself as hard as he did in his youth. He is given to smoking a homely mixture of shag which would put even my own to shame in its potency, and he is wearing, at the moment, orange corduroy trousers, as the threads on the rough edge of his seat suggest. But enough of this; let us just see what he has to say."

So saying, Pons turned to mount to our lodgings on the second floor of Number 7B.

Our visitor was sprawled comfortably in Pons' own chair beside the fireplace. At our entrance, he came to his feet with a grizzled smile, and doffed his cap. He was a man of some sixty-odd years, more grey than dark of hair, with a rough, weather-beaten face. He stood on a peg leg, visible from knee to floor, and did indeed wear orange corduroy trousers, with a dark blue jacket of like material. He was not corpulent, but he was heavy and solidly built. Moreover, he had been waiting for some time, as the dottle in the fireplace and the strong odor of a pungent tobacco suggested.

"Beggin' your pardon, Mr. Pons," he said, inclining his head to my companion. "Captain Andrew Walton."

"Once in the China trade. Late of the *Welkin,* I see," said

Pons, eyeing a scarf knotted about his neck.

"Aye, and the *Barbados* before her, and many a ship before that."

"Not long retired."

"Two years, sir."

"Living on the south coast."

"Aye, sir. Not far from New Romney, above the Dungeness Lighthouse."

Pons had removed his Inverness and deerstalker as he spoke. He slipped into his worn blue dressing-gown, exchanged his shoes for his slippers, and settled himself with a pipeful of shag, while our visitor waited politely for Pons' signal to continue.

"Me and Adelaide," he went on, "have come all the way to London from our little house . . ."

"Surely you did not bring Mrs. Walton with you on such a long journey by dog-cart!" I put in.

Our visitor favored me with an astonished stare, while Pons laughed heartily. "Forgive me, Parker—your little deductions never fail to touch me," he said. Coming to his feet, he strode across to the chair in which our visitor had been sitting, caught hold of it, and turned it to one side, revealing a large crate in which sat a solitary black bird. "This is Captain Walton's 'Adelaide'."

"A raven!" I cried.

"A cormorant," retorted Pons. "A fishing bird well known to England's waters, and in various parts of the world, but most especially Japan and the China coast, where the bird is gainfully employed and highly prized by coast fishermen."

"Aye, and a better fisher than Adelaide hasn't been born, and you may lay to that, Mr. Pons. I've had her nigh on to seven years, and I wouldn't have brought her along on such a trip, only that I'd no way of knowing what might go on while I was away from the house . . ."

Pons' eyes twinkled. "I take it, Captain Walton, something has disturbed the even tenor of your days."

"Aye, sir, that it has."

So saying, our visitor leaned forward and phlegmatically unstrapped his wooden leg, from the cushion of which he extracted a compact case of what appeared to be black leather. It was somewhat rectangular in shape, very much like a gentleman's large flat pocket wallet, except that it was not folded and was rather more bulky. This he handed to me for Pons, and I was surprised at its lightness.

"Cork lined," observed Pons, the moment he touched it. "Meant to float." His eyes danced. "I trust I am not amiss in suggesting that the faithful Adelaide brought it to you."

"Aye, sir. Now have a look at it. It's just as I found it, with

one exception. It had a little waterproof wrapping around it; that I took off."

"Why haven't you brought it?"

"I'll be coming to that in my time."

Pons opened the cork-lined case and disclosed two small pockets, from one of which projected a letter evidently intended to be mailed. Pons removed it without comment. From the other pocket he removed two objects—a thin-paper copy of a letter, and a postal card, unstamped, evidently not meant to be mailed, for it bore no address. On one side of the card typescript stood out. The thin-paper letter was folded and had evidently not long reposed in the package, for it was still relatively clean and bore only the wrinkling impress of Captain Walton's knee-stub. The thin-paper letter was clearly a copy of a letter written to the intended recipient of the other letter, which was stamped and enclosed in an envelope, bearing a typescript address—"The Rt. Hon. Geoffrey Crayle, M. P., 15 Bourget Street, London W. E."—and appeared to come from "John T. Evans, Dungeness Lthouse., nr. Lydd, Kent."

The envelope contained little more than one page of letter, to judge by its weight. It was slightly longer than the customary envelope, but not of legal size, and its flap was straight, rather than wedge-shaped. Pons examined the envelope perfunctorily, then dropped it to the table before him. He unfolded the thin-paper letter and read it with somewhat more care; it was an ordinary letter of commendation from a constituent to his representative in Parliament, approving the Member's recent stand on a public matter affecting the constituency. He favored the card with but little more attention. It was a perfectly plain postal card, bearing neither superscription nor address, and carrying but four lines of typescript, which read:

> Fifth without fail.
> Do not come to us.
> We will come to you.
> Sailing 10th *Normandie.*

Having finished his cursory examination, Pons looked up at last.

"Let us just have some hot water ready, Parker," he said to me, and, to our visitor, "Pray continue, Captain Walton."

"Well, sir," began the Captain with deliberation, "as you've heard, I'm a coast dweller, I make a little money beside my pension by carving out driftwood and the like, and I've got Adelaide trained to pick up whatever she can carry and bring it in—that is, beside the fish. A week ago yesterday, that would

be the third, she came in with this. I don't get out much, but it was my intention to mail the letter just as soon as I got into Lydd, but one thing and another came between, and it was three days ago before I got around to it.

"By that time, there had been some queer goings-on. I don't mean to say I was suspicious at first, but right off, someone was about making inquiries about me and Adelaide—roundabout, you understand, not so much from me as my neighbors. Once or twice I caught a glimpse of sunlight flashing off a spy-glass—it's a sight I'm familiar with, I can tell you. So I knew somebody was watching the house."

"This unwelcome attention began when, Captain Walton?" Pons put in. "Before or after the sixth?"

"Four days ago, sir."

"Ah, the seventh. Two days after the 'Fifth without fail'."

"On the evening of the eighth, I was that suspicious, I put the packet where you saw it, and went off along the coast after driftwood. While I was gone, someone got into my house and searched it, top to bottom. The only thing missing was the waterproof wrapper in which this packet had been kept dry."

"There was nothing, then, to show that you had not sent off the letter by post?"

"Nothing. But there was more to come. Little things—you might say, innocent things, except that they'd never happened before. Next day somebody came down from Folkestone and made enquiries about Adelaide. Did I have a fishing license for her? And the like. A strange, dark man, square of face—looked like a police officer. Did I want to sell my house, with all in it? On the eighth, someone shot at her—tipped her wing, he did. That was enough for me, Mr. Pons. I came to the conclusion that this packet is the cause of it all, and I asked myself why they couldn't have come direct and said to me they'd lost it and could they have it back. There's something mighty queer about it. If it belonged to Mr. Evans, why was it floating off the lighthouse unless he lost it by accident? If so, he had the right to come after it, if he thought I had it."

"Quite so," agreed Pons.

"I was of two minds about it at first—whether to go to the lighthouse or go to the police. But the police are suspicious and apt to be troublesome, and Mr. Evans has been unfriendly—to say the least—keeping to himself. So I recollected you'd done a bit of work for Miss Norton and she'd spoke highly of you; so here I am. Now, sir, if I can just leave this with you, I'll be on my way back."

"Let us not be hasty, Captain Walton," said Pons.

Our visitor looked inquiringly at Pons, as my companion got to his feet and took a turn or two about the room, his face a study in meditation. He walked over to the windows and back, paused a few moments at the mantel, where he flipped through two or three letters transfixed to it by his knife, and stood for a time before the fire, his keen eyes thoughtful, his brow furrowed, his lips pushing out and in, his hands clasped behind his back. He turned finally to Captain Walton.

"There is nothing demanding your presence at home?" he asked.

"Well, nought—save that I'm not over-fond of the city."

"I suggest then that you spend a few days in London."

"Eh? And what for, Mr. Pons?"

"It does not occur to you that it may be dangerous to return home just now?"

"I am not strange to danger, Mr. Pons," said our visitor stoutly.

"Quite so. Let us say until you hear from me, then. I will just give you a letter to the keeper of a lodging house not far from here. We may find it necessary to run down to Dungeness ourselves; if so, we can all go together."

Pons himself saw our visitor and his cormorant down the stairs. He came bounding back into the room, rubbing his hands together in a highly pleased manner.

"Now, then, Parker," said he, as he seated himself before the objects our visitor had left behind, "what do you make of it?"

"I have never known your hunger for new adventure to overcome your judgment," I answered. "There is hardly any mystery here. Evans simply dropped his wallet overboard on his way to mail his letter . . ."

"Conveniently wrapped in a cork-lined container, to make sure it floated," interposed Pons sarcastically.

"And the bird recovered it before he could do so," I finished doggedly. "I must say, Pons, you have a distressing tendency to make mystery where none exists, but I suppose that is only to be expected."

"Let me see," mused Pons, "you have been with me over a decade, almost twelve years, and in all that time it is only one of my cases which turned up something more—more, mind you, not less—than a mystery. And that, let me prod your memory, was the matter of Mr. Amos Dorrington's inheritance—you have been dancing attendance on his lovely daughter, Miss Constance, ever since."

"Nevertheless," I persisted, "I maintain if we ask Evans at the

lighthouse, he will confirm my theory."

"Would it not be to his interest to do so? I should assume so." Pons shook his head. "But this discussion is purely academic, for I am very much afraid Mr. Evans is in no position to be asked any questions whatever."

"Why do you say so?"

"Unless I am very much mistaken, Mr. Evans is dead," said Pons, with the same imperturbability he might have assumed were he ordering an egg for breakfast from our landlady, Mrs. Johnson.

"Pons, you are mad!" I exclaimed indignantly.

Pons clucked with growing impatience. "You have a disconcerting tendency to turn yourself into an alienist the moment your pet theory is challenged," he said. "I admit to some unwillingness always to abandon the obvious conclusion, but in this case yours is far from obvious. Let us just look into the matter a little more closely, setting aside the peculiar harassment to which Captain Walton and his cormorant have been subjected. I submit that it would hardly be logical of Mr. Evans to carry about with him at the same time both a letter to be mailed and the duplicate copy of that letter."

"Of course not. He would file the duplicate."

"Precisely."

"But, hold on, Pons!" I protested. "Aren't you jumping to conclusions? We have no evidence to show that the thin-paper copy is a duplicate of the letter enclosed in the envelope."

"Except the fact that it is there, present in the same packet —as were it to make sure Mr. Evans knew what he had written his M. P."

"You suggest that Mr. Evans is not the author of the letter purporting to come from him?"

"I do indeed. I submit he never saw it, and thus needed to have the duplicate so that he might know what he had supposedly written."

"My dear fellow," I said, not without scorn, "if ever I have read an innocuous letter, it is that duplicate copy. It is not even such a letter of which a copy is necessary!"

"Except, of course, for the most cursory reference as to what it contained." He glanced over toward the burner. "But let us just settle the point without further delay. We have ample steam up."

So saying, Pons rose and carried the letter to the steaming kettle, where he held its sealed flap over the steam. He hummed a little tune as he stood there, a particularly obnoxious practise I inevitably found all the more so when he was at his most recalcitrant in the face of my opposing views.

In a few moments he returned with the open envelope in one hand and the unfolded letter in the other. He put the letter down before me without comment. It was indeed the same in content as the thin-paper duplicate. Pons' interest, however, was not in the letter, but in the envelope.

"I fancy this is the reason for Captain Walton's harassment," said Pons, indicating the back of the open envelope.

He placed it face downward on the table. At first I could see nothing, but presently I realized that the line of sealing gum on the envelope was slightly raised. Even as I saw it, Pons had unclasped his pocket knife, prepared to operate on the envelope. In a trice, he was furling back a very thin strip of cellophane and disclosing an even thinner dark line beneath; it was this Pons drew forth with an exclamation of triumph.

"But what is it?" I cried.

"Microfilm," answered Pons, holding it up to the light.

I looked through the film but saw little save what appeared to be concrete structures in various stages of completion. They were interior photographs.

"Fortifications," said Pons.

"But where?"

"That, I daresay, is somewhat more in my brother's department than in my own. At this hour he should still be at the Foreign Office and on his private wire."

When he returned from the telephone, it was with word that his brother, Bancroft, a most enigmatic individual whose connection with the Foreign Office was of such a pervasive and inclusive nature that one could never guess at the importance of his post, save to conclude that it was of the greatest significance, was soon to join us.

"Now, then," continued Pons imperturbably, turning once more to the contents of our recent visitor's curious packet, "doubtless you have already arrived at the conclusion that this packet—like others of a similar nature—was dropped into the sea, very possibly from passing aircraft or ship, for Mr. Evans to find, save that in this case Adelaide's vigilance was greater than Evans' own."

"But is not that an absurdly roundabout procedure?" I protested.

"In espionage nothing is too roundabout, my dear Parker, especially if it comes from abroad —from France, perhaps?"

"But France is an ally!"

"Exactly."

"Even if our country needed information it could not obtain by regular channels, there would be other alternatives open to it."

Pons smiled patiently. "It suggests nothing to you that Mr. Evans transmits such letters as these to a country politician in London, and receives duplicate

copies of his letters with the originals?"

"Perhaps the letter is in cipher?"

Pons shook his head. "I thought of that at once. There is a poorly concealed message contained on the card, in addition to what the card suggests—that this letter must be delivered by the fifth and that by the tenth emissaries will act on its behalf. The so-called sailing date is nothing more or less than a time-limit, surely, since no such boat as the *Normandie* is scheduled to sail from any known port, as you will find if you take the trouble to scan the ships' registries. And, since today is the eleventh, the time limit has expired, and the warning must be put into effect."

"What warning?"

Pons tossed the card over to me. "That contained in the line-end syllables of this apparently innocent message."

I looked at the card again and read the four line-end syllables:

*fail us you die*

"I submit," said Pons, "it is not too much to assume that the threat so plainly set forth may already have been executed."

"Great Heavens, man! Why are you sitting there idly then?" I cried out.

"Because Mr. Evans is the merest cog in the machine. No, our quarry is somewhere in London. All we can do in the matter of Mr. Evans is to run down to Dungeness in the morning and make such enquiry as is possible, and perhaps at the same time notify the local police. If by some chance Evans is still alive, he can be taken readily enough when he is wanted."

"You are taking a singularly cold-blooded view of the matter. It is unlike you, Pons."

"Say not so," replied Pons, unmoved. "I fear any concern over Mr. Evans at this date is ill-ventured. Let us rather attend to those more immediate aspects of the matter which may affect the welfare of our country. We must now wait upon Bancroft's coming."

My companion's elder brother made his appearance within an hour, coming soundlessly up the stairs and into the room almost before Pons seemed aware of his approach.

"How now, Solar?" he asked quietly from the threshold, his broad shoulders and massive, leonine head filling the doorway. "What troubles you to the extent of sending for me?"

"This," said Pons, tapping the strip of film.

Bancroft came forward with his catlike tread, took up the strip of microfilm and held it to the light. His face paled.

"If you had known what these were, you would not have sent for me," said Bancroft Pons.

"Elementary, my dear brother," said Pons. "Fortifications of some kind. In France, I should assume. Extensive, since these would appear to be pictures of focal points of the sub-structure."

"These are interiors—and important secret interiors—of the Maginot Line fortifications," said Bancroft Pons. "How came they here?"

Without a word, Pons indicated the hiding place of the microfilm. Keeping to his feet, Bancroft Pons slipped his walking stick under one arm, took up the letter and the envelope, and subjected both to a rapid, intense scrutiny.

"The Honorable Geoffrey Crayle would seem to be of primary interest," said Pons, "since the microfilm was addressed to him."

"Tut, tut, let us not jump to unwarranted conclusions, Solar," reprimanded Bancroft. "Say rather the letter and the envelope were addressed to him."

"Ah, then he is a man of impeccable character."

"Unimpeachable."

"Married?"

"A bachelor."

"No longer young."

"Sixty-seven."

"He lives alone?"

"With a housekeeper."

"Dear me, how well-informed you are about our country politicians!" said Solar Pons.

"It is only a trifling part of my obligations to His Majesty's Government. Now, then, what of this fellow Evans?"

"I will make some inquiry in the morning. Otherwise, I leave him to you."

"He could not have been the writer, obviously. Merely an agent, then. The letter—and perhaps others before it—must have come from France, and it must be intended for German agents—or possibly Russian—in London. How did it come to your hand?"

My companion narrated rapidly and succinctly the circumstances of Captain Andrew Walton's visit.

"A cormorant," mused Bancroft. "By what humble phenomena of nature are the best-laid plans of men betrayed! I apologize to Mr. Burns. Adelaide, indeed! Where are they now?"

"Somewhere in London, pending disposal of the matter."

Bancroft appeared to muse for a moment. Then he touched the letter with one gloved finger. "This letter?"

"I may have use for it. Take the microfilm; I shall not need that."

"What do you expect to do?"

"First, to ascertain how these messages, addressed to an elected servant of His Majesty, a servant who is above reproach, could fall into the hands of a potential enemy of France and therefore,

also, England. Secondly, to rid the country of him, since I am not sanguine enough to believe that our own government in its merciful tenderness would move so boldly as to strike down the whole body of them—for it is manifestly only a small segment of an espionage ring upon which we have unwittingly stumbled here. Our French allies are less circumspect in these little matters, and not so prone to respect the claims of diplomatic immunity."

Bancroft Pons wrinkled his nose in almost haughty distaste. He carefully pocketed the microfilm, and stepped soundlessly to the threshold once more. "You have my number. Call on me if you need our help."

After his brother had gone, Pons sat for some time with his head sunk upon his breast, his eyes closed, his fingers tented before him. He offered nothing more by way of explanation, nor did I venture to ask, for fear that his replies would confuse me the more.

Early next morning found us on our way to New Romney, bound for the Dungeness lighthouse, a journey of a little over an hour by rail from Charing Cross, leading through the beautiful Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells country to the region of the Cinque Ports. But throughout our journey, Pons was too preoccupied to look beyond the floor and walls of our compartment; convinced as he was that our journey would gain him nothing but the verification of his deductions of the evening before; he sat in deep thought, with his eyes half closed and his head sunk upon his breast.

Once at New Romney, we changed to the cars of the quaint miniature railway which runs to Dungeness from that ancient port, a short journey to the tip of the spit of land which points to the lighthouse, a desolate area, with the wide Denge Marsh reaching inland to Lydd and back toward New Romney. Dungeness itself presented its customary isolation—one of pubs and fishermen and their little houses, dominated by the lighthouse in the sea. We had no trouble engaging a boat to take us to the lighthouse, and there we found the keeper, a bush-bearded old fellow who called himself Elijah Moorehead.

"Evans!" he exclaimed in response to Pons' question. "So you came to ask me about Evans! A strange thing he should be missing."

"Ah," murmured Pons. "How long has he been gone?"

"Two days, Mr. Pons."

Pons glanced significantly at me, while Moorehead continued.

"He set out in his boat—he was as much at home in it as he was here—and he has not re-

turned. The boat has shown up, capsized. I have reported him missing to the proper authorities."

"Quite right, Mr. Moorehead. You say he was much in his boat. Was he not bound to his duties here?"

"Oh, yes, sir. But he had more freedom than I liked. We were much troubled with aeroplanes flying too close, and he had devised some sort of chain of red flares on buoys to be made visible even in the dense fogs which plague us here. So he was much about looking after them. Still, he was an able hand in his boat."

"What was his destination when he last left here?"

"I believe he was going down the coast to meet a friend." Moorehead's eyes narrowed. "You don't think, Mr. Pons, he may have met with foul play?"

"We shall see in good time," replied Pons. "I suggest that in any event you keep his things as they were, in case the police should want to look in."

"Perhaps you'd like to see his room, Mr. Pons."

Pons accepted the lighthouse keeper's invitation with alacrity.

Evans' room, however, was singularly bare. Pons turned up, significantly, only a neat file of duplicate letters, eleven in number, which had been sent to the Right Honorable Geoffrey Crayle over a period of three months, but he did not disturb them.

"I should venture to guess," he said when at last we were on our way back to London, "that the extremely chancey method of delivering messages to Evans originated with Evans, and that he had some difficulty convincing his confederates of the feasibility of his plan. Hence his vigilance in the face of their temper."

When I woke the following morning, I found myself alone.

Pons had not gone, however, without leaving cryptic word for me. Pinned to the cloth of the breakfast table beside my plate, was a short cutting from one of the morning papers. In sum, it set forth that the body of John T. Evans, employed at the Dungeness Lighthouse, had been found along shore in the vicinity of the long beach at Dungeness. He had been drowned, and his death was presumed to be an accident.

When I returned past mid-day from my round of medical calls, I found Pons just in. He was divesting himself of garb I should have thought belonged more properly on a street-hawker.

"Your message did not escape me," I said. "No doubt you have already corrected the local verdict?"

"On the contrary," said Pons. "Mr. Evans has got his just deserts. He dealt with engaging

employers, some of whom, alas! are untouchable through ordinary legal channels."

"Are diplomats forever immune?" I cried.

He nodded. "You have chronicled, I think, one or two of my little encounters with that sinister arch-criminal, the Baron Ennesfred von Kroll."

"Not he again!" I cried.

"I fear his hand is all too evident in this. Does it surprise you to learn that the house at number 17 Bourget is occupied by one Herman Albert Hauptmann, in the German government service?"

"Why, that is next door to Crayle's home."

"Ah, that is no coincidence, Parker. Moreover, Mr. Hauptmann has certain connections in Germany—he is married to a niece of Baron Kroll. Further, he has a young son of tender years; he is nine. His name is Otto. Little Otto is an enterprising lad much given to philately. Every day he collects the discarded envelopes—'covers', they are called by philatelists—from the houses of all the neighbors. However unwittingly, little Otto thus serves the Vaterland. Need one be told how lovingly his father assists him at his hobby—carefully steaming off stamps—the while ungumming a flap or two?

"I was about this morning as a tradesman, and the Honorable Crayle's elderly housekeeper, who is evidently as kind-hearted as he himself is reputed to be, turned out to be a veritable encyclopedia of information about all the neighbors. I submit that the intelligence gathered through Hauptmann's system of espionage finds its way directly to Baron Kroll, and from him in the diplomatic pouches to Germany. There may be other Evanses in the chain, though I am inclined to doubt it, since the loss of any one link would then break and endanger the entire chain. The actual spy is somewhere in France, with access to the means of bringing his information unchallenged across the channel. Could anything be safer than a constituent's letter to his M. P.? These Germans have the guileless minds of children."

Once again in his dressing-gown, with a pipe of shag between his lips, my companion sat down before the envelope and letter intended for the Rt. Hon. Geoffrey Crayle.

"Let us just see what we can put together," he said. "We shall send along the Honorable Crayle's letter, but with a little something else in place of the microfilm."

He cut out a thin strip of cellophane, and, as I watched, he pricked into it, by means of a pin, this message:

*Komm schnell oder Alles ist verloren.*

This he gummed to the envelope in place of the microfilm, then sealed the envelope. He put the envelope into the rack for outgoing mail and leaned back, a satisfied smile on his face.

"As soon as this reaches Herr Hauptmann, it will be safe for Captain Walton and his Adelaide to return to Kent. Meanwhile, a cautionary word to Scotland Yard, to make sure that our man is followed in his flight from London, and another to the Sureté, ought to insure a little round of trouble for Hauptmann and his French counterpart away from our own shores at the hands of a government appreciably less sensitive about the rights of espionage agents. We cannot capture Baron Kroll—but he and I will meet again!"

Within the week, Captain Walton's dog-cart, with Adelaide perched sedately in her crate, ready for the journey back to the southeast coast, was at the curb before Number 7B. He had come back not only at Pons' invitation but also to make a token payment to Pons for his efforts on behalf of Adelaide and the cork-lined packet. On the previous day, Captain Walton and his bird had gone up country among the canals of the Thames; Adelaide had not been idle; she had caught Pons a dozen fat bream.

The morning papers had just come in, and Pons showed Captain Walton the conclusion of his adventure, chronicled therein under the heading: *Crush German Spy Ring,* which was, said Pons, somewhat "inaccurate, owing more to the enthusiasm of Scotland Yard than to the press."

It set forth the dramatic shadowing of a spy from London to a meeting with a confederate in Paris, and the subsequent death of both in a battle with the French officers.

"But it says here, 'By means of close co-operation between Scotland Yard and the French Sureté . . .'" began Captain Walton. "Not a word about you, Mr. Pons."

Pons smiled. "Ah, that, Captain Walton, is like Adelaide's discovery of the cork-lined packet—one of life's least ironies."

# the day of the cripples

*by . . . Vincent Starrett*

**Why did the Frog cross the street just at that time?**

IT WAS nearly five when Delaney saw the girl approaching. The clock in the neighboring Merchants Exchange began to strike the hour while they were conversing—if conversing is the word.

She came up brightly in an aura of friendliness and good will, touched with the bewilderment of a stranger. Her smile was that of a lost child. The traffic, homeward bound, squawked and roared around them as she calmly stripped off one white glove, whipped out a little pad of paper, and wrote awkwardly with a gold pencil, "Will you please direct me to the Union Station?"

*My God!* thought Delaney. *A mute, at this hour of day!*

On all sides cars and trucks were lumbering past, stalling, clashing, piling up, their drivers honking impatient horns and shouting insults at each other. The uproar was ear-splitting; but to the pretty girl in the red toque it was as if nothing whatever was happening around her.

Automatically, the policeman

---

*Vincent Starrett, distinguished novelist, anthologist and editor, who needs no introduction to any* CHICAGO TRIBUNE *reader, turns to carefully plotted murder in the half-world just off Chicago's Rush Street. . . . These are the streets that are still alive at five and six in the morning—incredible hours to the rest of us—and hours when bitter men can dream of things that can be accomplished, far from legally of course, at even weirder hours. . . .*

---

on point duty reached for the little pad, thought better of it, and tried to respond with waving arms and diacritical fingers. *Five blocks west, three blocks south*—Good Lord, where *was* the Union Station! He knew exactly where it was and could have *told* her in six or seven words. Bus 19 would take her there in no time.

The lights had changed and now the uproar was all the other way. He blew his whistle viciously, swung his arms like a semaphore, and grimly began to write his instructions. His fingers never had moved so slowly. As he wrote the traffic load continued to mount. The din around them became more strident.

At length it was done. He handed back the pad with a sympathetic smile, blew his whistle again, and turned to see what had happened to the city while he was away.

When he turned she was—Good Lord, she was writing him another note!

He tried to stop her, tried to stop a daring motorist trying to beat the light, blew his whistle again, then snatched the pad to see what she had written.

"Thank you! But where do I get Bus No. 19?"

"Over on State Street," he shouted aloud; and then was embarrassed by her puzzled smile.

The stream of cars had continued to increase. The tangle was getting out of hand. Nothing quite like this had happened to him since the big fire of 1953.

Once more he snatched the pad and laboriously wrote out his instructions.

She nodded gratefully, quietly slipped her pad and pencil into her bag, and unhurriedly left her perilous position in the center of the crowded crossing.

A traffic jam of unparalleled proportions was in the making. Already whistles were sounding a block away. The lines of cars seemed endless, and Delaney swore helplessly. He held the North-South traffic for a moment with his arms and watched her pick her way to the curb in the direction he had indicated.

Then, as she merged with the waiting crowd on the sidewalk, he blew his whistle savagely—and with a roar the North-South traffic began to pour through its appointed channel.

It was at this moment that he turned and saw the blind man.

Apparently the poor devil had missed the whistle; he had started for the west side of the street against the current of traffic. Cars were braking wildly to keep from hitting him; they were bumping each other fore and aft while their drivers alternately cursed and prayed. The noise was greater than ever.

The man with the white cane and dark glasses was moving

without fear, however, swaying his stick gently as he walked, occasionally tapping the fenders of the furiously braking cars that threatened to strike him down.

Delaney's screaming whistle of command, shrill, staccato, sharply-repeated, may have saved the man's life. The harassed policeman hurried to his side and they finished the journey together, while drivers three blocks away piled up their cars and wondered what had happened up ahead.

"I never saw anything to beat it!" said Delaney aloud, and mopped his forehead. The cars were moving past him slowly, barely an inch apart; those trying to turn the corner were solidly bumper to bumper, and threatened to remain so for hours. *At this time of day!* his thought continued. *My God! . . . every cripple in Chicago . . . !*

It was at this moment that he saw the Human Frog, and his eyes all but popped from their sockets.

The Frog was patiently waiting for the light that would take him safely from the west curb to the east. He was perfectly able to navigate without help; for, although cut off at the thighs, he was mounted on a small platform on wheels which he pushed along with his hands.

He was a well known figure in certain parts of Chicago. Delaney had heard of him vaguely but had never seen him before. There was nothing against him; he was just a pathetic figure from whom some persons turned their eyes, and for policemen he was always a problem. Generally all traffic was stopped when he wanted to cross a street. As a man of sense, he did not often visit the congested Chicago Loop; and to find him there at five o'clock on a Friday afternoon with twelve thousand cars trying to reach the suburbs by six was unusual and disturbing.

The traffic situation was now hopelessly beyond anybody's control, and Delaney profanely shrugged it off. "To hell with it!" he said; and blew his whistle for a full stop and went to greet the Frog.

Underneath, his thoughts continued: *My God, every cripple in Chicago must have chosen this day to come downtown!*

"Thank you, Officer," said the Frog politely, when they had made the crossing together safely. "I'm sorry to be such a bloody nuisance."

"Think nothing of it, me lad," said Delaney amiably. "That's what I'm paid for."

He glanced at the lights, waited for an instant, then blew his whistle again and watched the traffic leap to life. It had been a trying experience; but apparently it was over. No more cripples

were waiting at the curb; the lines of cars were now moving steadily north, south, east and west. In an hour or two perhaps the mess would be straightened out. Delaney didn't much care whether it was or wasn't.

But the coincidence of incompetents continued to fill him with wonder. "My God, every cripple in Chicago . . . !" he muttered every time he remembered the embarrassment.

It would be something to tell his wife when he got home.

Karlov's, in the Grand Babylon Hotel, is one of the great jewelry shops of the nation. Its headquarters in Paris is perhaps the greatest arsenal of precious stones in the world; but its branches in London, New York, Chicago, and elsewhere, although smaller than the parent office, are not far behind. Chicago's turnover is easily a cool million every year.

The austere little shop, with its modest frontage in Wabash Avenue, does not attract the curious crowds that frequent the auction sales of brass watches farther south; but the wealthiest diamond buyers of the world visit it from time to time, and occasionally a historic rarity or a notable collection of gems is on exhibition for the select few.

On this week-end, it was the Cullerton collection that was on view, a potential fortune for men of ill will with the requisite imagination. And it was the Cullerton collection, plus several handfuls of other diamonds, rubies, sapphires and emeralds —a tidy dowry for a princess— that vanished on that Friday evening with the celerity of a conjuror's trick.

By the only stroke of good fortune vouchsafed the police, Dallas—the chief of detectives and a mighty man hunter—was on the scene by six o'clock. This happened because one of the three men found gagged and handcuffed on the floor of the shop, when the police broke in, had managed to roll himself to a telephone and knock it over. His outcry, although muffled and misunderstood, brought a sizable police squad to Karlov's; and, since it was an influential establishment, Dallas appeared in person.

Two of the three imprisoned men still lay behind the counters where they had been tossed; the third—the manager—was still trying to inch himself to the front door. What had happened to the burglar alarm, he couldn't imagine. Apparently it had been disabled by the bandits.

"Handcuffs!" snorted the chief of detectives. "Well, I'll be damned!" He examined them critically, piddled with them for a few moments, and added: "Take a look at these, Durkin,

and see what you can do with them. They don't look official to me."

Gags had been removed from the mouths of the three prisoners; they were speaking volubly. Their stories coincided precisely. Shortly before five o'clock, as they were preparing to leave, three men had entered—one through the front door and two from the side entrance that led into the lower level of the hotel. Two of them had showed revolvers. The third man, the man from the front, had produced handcuffs and gags, and in a jiffy—almost—the assault was over. They had then been dumped down behind the counters, and the thieves had looted the shop.

It had been as simple as that, the prisoners said. Certain trays of rare gems had not yet been placed in the vault, so the door of the big vault was still open. The whole enterprise had taken less than ten minutes. It was as if every move had been thought out beforehand and accurately timed. The bandits had left by the side door and presumably had mingled with the desultory groups of citizens using the street level of the hotel as a passage between two main thoroughfares.

"They're not *ours*, anyway," said Durkin, replying to his superior's question. "There's something phony about them, Chief; but I can't make out what it is. They're certainly doing all they're supposed to do."

"We'll need a locksmith, or something," said Dallas, annoyed. "You and Burns take them to headquarters and see what you can do for them." He addressed himself again to the miserable Karlov men. "You say the fellows didn't wear masks or cover their faces in any way, so I suppose you could recognize them again if you saw them!"

As one man, the three swore they would recognize the other trio anywhere, any time. "I thought I recognized one of them when he came in," said the manager. "I mean, I think he had been here before—pretending to be interested in diamonds."

"Naturally," agreed Dallas. "He was looking things over; getting the lay of the land. Well, run them up to headquarters, Durkin, and have them look at our photographs. This is a professional job if ever I saw one. We've probably got pictures of *all* of them. How much did you say they got away with?"

"Impossible to guess without a check. It may need an inventory. Maybe half a million! Maybe only a couple of hundred thousand. They got the Cullerton collection, you know."

"The Cullerton collection!

What's that? You don't handle postage stamps, do you?"

"I wish we did!" said the manager bitterly.

"And get the traffic cop in here before you go, Durkin," ordered Dallas acidly. "I wonder what *he* was doing while all this was going on."

Delaney made his belated appearance in the shop. "Delaney, sir!" He saluted briskly. "Just about to go off duty. Just waiting for my relief. I saw your car drive up and wondered what had happened. Glad you got them, sir! I saw those three mugs in cuffs being put into the car."

"Good work!" said Dallas dryly. "I'm glad you can see *something*. Those three men in handcuffs were employees of this shop; one of them is the manager. They were robbed—less than half an hour ago—of half a million bucks in diamonds. You're on duty for quite a while yet, Delaney. Come back here when your relief arrives."

"He's out there now," reported Delaney from the front door. "And I've left him a hell of a job, if you ask me. I've never known anything so crazy as this last hour, Chief. It ain't surprising I didn't see any of this thing. My God, every cripple in Chicago . . ."

He launched into his grievance, and slowly the chief of detectives pieced the puzzle together.

"Three of them," Dallas repeated. "A mute, a blind man, and then—the Frog. And it all began at five o'clock!"

"Maybe a couple of minutes before. I remember hearing the Exchange clock strike as the girl began to write."

"And it didn't occur to you that there was any connection between the three events! That it was planned that way to keep *you* busy while they pulled off this job!"

"Who, sir? Those three! Not a chance! They simply *couldn't* have—"

"Not them, no," said Dallas. "Their little pals—the *other* three who looted Karlov's—whoever they were!" Not too unkindly he added: "I'm not blaming you, Delaney. It was a smart job by smart people. But you sure lost a swell chance of promotion by not strolling over here, just once, to spit."

"This 'Frog' sir . . ." began Delaney persuasively. "Are you sure about him now? From all I've heard, he ain't that kind of a boy at all. He's a bit of a character up north—along Rush Street—in the nightclub district. Everybody there seems to like him, though I'd never seen him before myself."

"I've heard of him," Dallas conceded. "He could be all right, I don't know. If he has a record, the Oak Street station will know about it. Anyway, he's our

best bet right now; the only one of the three cripples we can identify—or who can identify the others."

He began to give orders . . .

"Flannery, you and Carey get out to Oak Street and look into the 'Frog' angle. Find out where he lives and try to bring him in. I'm going back to Headquarters —telephone as soon as you can. Delaney, you're coming with me. I want *you* to look at some pictures, too."

The evening papers carried the robbery, and the subsequent tragedy, separately, in their late editions, out about eight-thirty.

> Joseph Fogazzaro, 36, proprietor of a 'Magic Shop' in Chestnut Street, near Rush, was found dead this evening in the living quarters of his home behind the small establishment in which he sold magical apparatus for professional magicians and trick toys for children. According to Chief of Detectives William Dallas, the circumstances suggest foul play, and an investigation is proceeding. Fogazzaro, a cripple, was affectionately called "The Frog" by his many friends along Rush Street, a name he humorously bestowed on himself when he opened his place of business some years ago.

The looting of Karlov's vault was more prominently displayed; and no connection between the two events was suggested. Dallas, unsure of his ground, was playing it safe. Delaney's story of the three cripples was not given to the press immediately or the public might have drawn its own conclusions and the criminals involved might have made their escape.

Dallas was afraid they had done so anyway. His comment to Jimmie Lavender, when the famous private investigator called him up that evening, was on the gloomy side. Lavender read the papers almost as quickly as they appeared, and he was on the phone by nine o'clock.

"It's clear enough what happened," the chief admitted, when he had unburdened himself of the known facts. "The woman received the loot from the men in the shop, probably at the side door. The blind man —only of course he wasn't blind—was right on her heels. The others dashed out and joined them in the arcade; then all five dashed through to State Street, where of course the getaway car was waiting."

"They wouldn't need to *dash,*" demurred Lavender. "As far as they knew, they had plenty of time. It was just a stroke of luck—your getting there when you did. If the manager hadn't been able to knock over a tele-

phone, you might have heard nothing about the robbery until morning."

"What are you suggesting?" asked Dallas truculently. They had been friendly enemies for years.

"Murder, of course," said Jimmie Lavender. "You and I know that Delaney's three 'cripples' created a diversion just when they did, to give the bandits a chance to operate more safely. Maybe they were paid to do it; I don't know—but the Frog was a friend of mine, and I propose to attend the execution of his murderer. I want to go over the whole case with you, on the spot."

"Okay!" said Dallas, who appreciated the sort of assistance the famous private detective could give. "Where do you want to begin?"

The chief was speaking from Headquarters, where nothing whatever had occurred to gladden his heart. The three Karlov men had been through hundreds of photographs of known jewel thieves and had failed to recognize any of them. Nor had Delaney anything of the sort to contribute.

"Meet me at Karlov's," said Lavender. "I suppose some of your men are still there. And bring Delaney along, Dallas. I want it all first hand."

"You don't want to go to the Frog's shop first?"

"We'll go there when we get through at Karlov's."

"Okay," said Dallas again. "I'll be there in twenty minutes."

"Let's begin where it began for Delaney," said Lavender, when they stood together outside the jewelry shop. "Take it from the middle of the street, Delaney, and show me how everything happened."

The three investigators advanced to the center of the intersection, while the night life of the district went on around them.

"The sorrel filly came from *there,*" began the traffic cop obediently. "She had red hair and a red hat, like I told the chief—a toque, I think they call them. And she had blue eyes, and she was wearing white gloves. She strips one of them off as she comes toward me, and then . . ."

He continued, uninterrupted, until he had finished with the mute.

"Her course was east to west," summarized Lavender. "And the blind man must have been right on her heels. He was east to west, too, as I understand it."

"That's right, sir; he wasn't far behind, but I didn't see him coming until the girl was across. When I looked round he'd already started, although the lights were against him. He was

wearing dark glasses, of course, and swinging his stick easylike. You know the way they . . ."

Lavender let him finish.

"But the Frog's course was west to east," said Dallas. "They didn't all come from the same spot."

"What the Frog did isn't too important, except as it delayed traffic and continued the snarl," said Lavender. "As I see it, the Frog was hired to do a job. The other two were in it together. It was beautifully timed. Obviously, the Frog's instructions were to start across—west to east—as soon as he saw the blind man reach the curb safely, east to west. It gave them maybe two more minutes in the shop, if they needed it. When the Frog's job was over he was through. He went home by taxi perhaps—not under his own power anyway—and one of the others followed him quickly, and murdered him. He knew too much."

"I agree, of course," said Dallas. "It's exactly the way I figured it myself. Now tell me about the girl and the blind man."

They strolled back to the southwest corner, and Lavender studied the stretch of store fronts in two directions.

"The girl—no more a mute than Delaney, of course—passed the jewelry shop without a glance, I would say, and turned into the hotel entrance just beyond. She received the diamonds, or whatever it was she received, at the side door giving on to the arcade. Took them without a sign, probably, and went on about her business."

"Check," said Dallas agreeably.

"The blind man followed her rather closely, but he didn't join her immediately. He had at least one thing to do first. He had to pocket his dark glasses, after reaching the curb, and get rid of his white stick.

"I wondered what he did with that stick," said Dallas.

"There were plenty of people around. The sidewalks were crowded. Nobody would be watching him. He snatched off his glasses and put them in his pocket, standing close beside the building, perhaps half concealed by one of these doorways."

Jimmie Lavender smiled in quick amusement. "Conveniently," he chuckled, "there was a florist's establishment next door to the jewelry shop. Just outside, in the doorway, was—*and still is*—a tub of greens of some sort. I'm no horticulturist, Dallas—you tell me what they are. Anyway, you can guess now what happened. Walking close to the building, he thrust his stick down into that tub of vegetation, and released it. The leaves would hide the curve of the handle; the white shaft would barely show. Then per-

haps he turned his back on it and lit a cigarette. On my honor, I can't see the stick from here—but I'll bet four dollars it's in that tub. It's *got* to be."

It was Dallas who plunged forward and resurrected a white stick. "Jimmie," he said, "you're a magician or something."

"Oh, one of your boys would have found it sooner or later," smiled Lavender. "They were too busy inside to do any storybook detecting *outside*."

"You mean you got that just by imagination, Mr. Lavender?" It was Delaney asking a question.

"I have a wicked imagination," agreed Jimmie Lavender. "It's what I would have done myself."

They strolled past the jewelry store without a glance at the headquarters men inside, and turned into the hotel doorway.

"This is the way they came," continued Lavender. "Once around this corner they were reasonably safe. The girl got the loot—as I believe you called it—at the side door, and went on. The blind man, no longer blind, followed and—"

"And they both hurried through the arcade to State Street, a block away," Dallas interrupted. "The getaway car was waiting . . ." He hesitated.

"If there *was* a car," said Lavender. "It was a bad hour for a parked car. Of course a man may have been cruising round and round the block, ready to pick them up when they appeared. They'd be in a hurry, of course, even though actually they had no reason to suppose they'd be suspected for hours—maybe not before morning—maybe never at all, if somebody wasn't smart enough to question Delaney about that ten-minute stretch at five o'clock. Let's stroll through and have a look."

The adventurers ambled slowly through the arcade between two thoroughfares, Dallas swinging the blind man's stick to and fro.

But Lavender didn't like the look of State Street; it was too congested with cars and buses even at nine-thirty. Something inside was troubling him—trying to tell him something.

"Look here, Dallas," he said, "why wouldn't it have been easier—and safer, for that matter—to have a room waiting for them in the hotel? That's what *I'd* have done."

"*Good God!*" said Dallas; and he stood for a moment, thinking it over. "You mean there's a chance they're registered upstairs? That would take a hell of a lot of nerve, Jimmie."

"Or intelligence," said Jimmie Lavender. "But there's no harm in asking a few questions, surely?"

"All the questions you like,"

agreed Dallas exuberantly. "Let's go!"

It is always well in an emergency to have a chief of detectives along. His authority is prodigious, and it is unquestioned. In a few minutes they were closeted with an assistant manager, who listened at first courteously, then with mounting alarm, to the story they unfolded.

"I get it," he said at last, and turned quickly to the telephone. "Bring me up today's arrival cards," he directed briefly, and returned to his visitors. "Are today's cards enough?"

"They'll do to start with," said Lavender. "We won't make any more trouble for you than we have to."

"If those birds are here," said the assistant manager, "we're going to find them if we have to search every room in the hotel. There are fourteen hundred," he added, with a ghost of a smile.

They looked over some sixty cards together, without any idea of what they were looking for.

"It's awkward, not having their names," said the assistant manager apologetically. "How did you expect to recognize their card if it turned up?"

Dallas was experiencing a change of heart; he was irritable and impatient.

"Mr. Lavender's genius, or imagination, are what we are depending on," he acknowledged with a touch of sarcasm.

"Do you know any of these people?" asked Lavender. "Don't any of the names mean anything to you? Can't you help us by eliminating certain persons you know to be reputable citizens—old customers—friends of the hotel?"

The assistant manager shook his head dubiously and ultimately he telephoned down for all the arrival cards of the week.

Lavender found the card he was looking for among the Monday arrivals.

"Mr. and Mrs. George Spelvin," read the names on the registration card; and there was an address: "New York, N.Y."

"Well, well!" said Jimmy Lavender.

"Never heard of them, I'm afraid," said the assistant manager.

"Nor I," said Dallas. "Who are they, Jimmie?"

"I don't know," said Jimmie Lavender. "I only know they are phonys. But I'd like to have a look at them. Shall we go up?"

Room 1124 was quite empty, however; their birds—if they *were* their birds—had flown. The Spelvins had paid their bill and checked out that evening, shortly after five o'clock.

The door of the suspected room stood open; a maid was working on it and other rooms in the corridor, changing the

linen. She had not seen the Spelvins depart, she said, and the clerk in the corridor, who had received their key, had little of interest to report. They were pleasant enough people, she thought; they seemed to her to talk like foreigners.

"Foreigners?" echoed Lavender. "Do you mean French or German—or English?"

Why, yes, as she came to think of it, they *might* have been English. There was a certain precision in their speech, she indicated; they chopped their words in a funny way and were a bit superior. As a matter of fact, they talked a bit like actors.

"They *were* actors," said Jimmie Lavender. "They didn't leave anything behind, did they?" He looked at the maid.

"Oh, no, sir— Well, only a glove. Just one! I couldn't find the other. I gave it to Miss Manton."

"Why, yes," said Miss Manton, who was the clerk, "so you did." She produced it from her desk. "I was going to turn it in, in case they returned for it."

It was a single white cotton glove, of no great beauty or value, such as any of thousands of young women might and probably did wear. Dallas shrugged and put it in his pocket. There was nothing further to be learned.

"There'll be some fingerprint men along here as soon as I can get to a telephone," he told the assistant manager. "Keep the room locked until they've come and gone."

The chief was discontented. "What made you so sure they were actors, Jimmie?" he asked, as they waited for the elevator.

"Well, their clipped speech for one thing; the clerk said they spoke like foreigners. But principally because of their alleged name. The name *George Spelvin* is that of a mythical actor. It's used by an actor who plays two or more parts in the same play. You'll find it on most programs showing a large cast. People other than actors know about it, of course; but probably only an actor would use it as an alias in a setup like this."

"We don't know yet that they had anything to do with this setup," Dallas demurred. "That's just a hunch of yours."

"We know they're concealing their names. They must have *something* to hide. And they checked out pretty promptly, after the robbery."

"It may all be in *your* mind," Dallas insisted. He pulled the woman's glove from his pocket and looked at it without favor. "I can't see how this is going to help us much either—even if you're right."

"It's a *clue,*" said Jimmie Lavender maliciously. It was a word he knew Dallas hated.

Delaney was still with them, not contributing much. The chief sent him home.

Dallas's car was parked near a fire hydrant, in defiance of city ordinances. It took them swiftly to the Magic Shop in Chestnut Street, where the Frog's mutilated body awaited them.

"They're probably on the train for New York right now," grumbled the big policeman as they threaded the downtown traffic. "I still think we're wasting time."

"You had the stations covered," said Lavender. "They *may* have taxied to the station, at that; but if they did they turned around and took the next taxi home. I'd have played it that way myself."

"If they live in Chicago, sure," agreed Dallas.

"They knew the Frog," said Jimmie Lavender. "It has to be somebody who knew the Frog."

The Magic Shop was a strange little place, with an indubitable "atmosphere." One felt it, just crossing the threshold. An atmosphere of mystery; and more than a touch of eeriness, too. Or was it the presence of death in this ugly form that made them fall silent?

Jimmie Lavender was sensitive to first impressions, and the Frog had been a friend. For a number of years the cripple had run a newsstand on the near North Side, and Lavender had been a regular customer. In recent years—since he had gone into another and even stranger business—Lavender had not seen much of him. But Joe had been a friendly boy, and a good one; it was difficult to believe him a sinister figure in this fantastic diamond burglary.

An unusual sound met them as they entered the living quarters behind the shop—a burst of shrill greeting and protest from a canary, in a low cage near the rear window.

"He's been going on like that for an hour," said the policeman on guard at the shop.

"He's hungry," said Jimmie Lavender, examining the bird's empty cup. "Thirsty, too. I wonder where Joe kept this bird's food?"

He strode to the body of Joe Fogazzaro, sprawled awkwardly in a big chair, and looked at it for a time in silence. The corpse of the cripple looked like that of a dwarf in the embrace of the huge chair. But the dead eyes seemed to be popping; they stared like the eyes of a corpse painted open in the art room of a newspaper.

"Poor little guy!" said Jimmie Lavender; and then, "I wonder where he kept his bird seed."

"Bathroom maybe," answered Dallas, who was standing stock still in the center of the room,

staring around him. "How would you say he was killed, Jimmie?"

"Strangulation is indicated."

Lavender's voice was muffled. He was rummaging in a wall cabinet holding bottles and small packages with labels. He returned to the canary's cage and poured something into its food cup. The second cup he refilled with water. Then, having done his duty by the living, he turned again to the dead.

"It's a little odd that his 'dolly' isn't right here beside him," he mused. "I mean his cart—they call them 'dollys' in the warehouse business."

The cripple's platform on wheels was some distance away, tilted against the wall. One of its corners had bumped the plaster smartly and knocked out some sizable chips.

"There was more of a disturbance here than one might guess," Lavender continued. "I've an idea somebody accidentally stepped on that platform—got tangled in it somehow—and it ran away with him. After killing Joe, he stepped back into the 'dolly,' skidded across the room, and brought up against the wall with a bump. May have bruised himself or strained a tendon. Unless you're used to them, those things are dangerous."

"Can't see that it helps us any, right now," said Dallas. "He didn't break a leg, or Flannery and Carey would have found him here."

"What's this?" asked Lavender suddenly, plucking a crumpled ball of cotton cloth from the table at the policeman's elbow.

"That's the thing we found in his mouth," said Carey. "He was gagged when we found him, you know, even though he was dead. I told you that on the telephone, Chief. It's just an old glove, Mr. Lavender—he used whatever he found handy, I guess, just before he killed him."

The confusion of pronouns was sufficiently clear. Lavender smoothed the glove out and laid it on the table. Without a word, Dallas drew the other glove from his pocket and placed it beside its mate.

"So it was the woman!" he said.

"Co-educational job, perhaps," said Jimmie Lavender. "Possibly they were both here."

He continued to prowl about the premises, vanishing for a time into the shop. Dallas followed him.

"What are you looking for, Jimmie?" asked the chief impatiently; and added, "if you know!"

"I had a notion I might find—Yep, here they are! A whole gross of them."

The chief of detectives stared.

"Handcuffs!" he cried. "Well, I'll be damned!"

"Trick handcuffs," said Jimmie Lavender. He clicked a pair of them shut and passed them to the chief. "Are they anything like those you found on the Karlov trio?"

"I'd say they were the same." Dallas strove vainly for a few moments to find the combination; then gave it up. "We had to file them off those three guys! Show me," he said.

Jimmie Lavender released the secret catch and the handcuffs opened with a metallic chuckle.

"Joe sold 'em," he said; "and this fellow bought some. I thought it might be something like that when so many theatrical angles kept turning up. The ring-leader in this crazy plot is probably a magician." He looked at his watch. "He's probably on the stage at this minute—somewhere—having the time of his life."

In these days even good magicians come down in the world and may be found in some otherwise pretty dubious entertainment halls. But to St. Croix Eastland, a first rate performer and a man of intelligence, that phase of his downward progress seemed about over. He had no intention of continuing indefinitely in tenth-rate nightclubs on the fringe of the Bohemian rialto. He was faintly tired, he mused, of little trollops waggling photogenic hips. The murder of the Frog didn't trouble him greatly, as yet; he was still keyed to a high pitch of arrogant distaste for poverty and all its manifestations. Anyway, what did the Frog have to live for?

He came onto the stage for the final show—at the Oo La La—to mysterious music, which faded out until only the eerie beat of the tympani remained. His pythoness, a good-looking redhead, and his several other assistants, were already on stage, and the involved "business" that preceded the *finale* went forward without a hitch.

At length he faced the "firing party"—a tall, distinguished looking man with a small black moustache, the only feature of his personality that was not in a major key. It seemed to Lavender that he limped a little; probably he *had* strained a leg muscle at that. The redhead in tights handed him his magic plate, which had the mysterious power of turning bullets. Actually, he would drop three marked bullets onto the plate, from his mouth, at the psychological moment.

Three men in nondescript uniform—they looked like drum majors—lifted their rifles and leveled them at his breast.

While a cynical but slightly breathless audience of drinkers watched his every move, he

nodded sharply and said *"Fire!"* in a voice of dauntless courage.

On the instant three shots rang out, and the tall figure in evening garb reeled, twisted, and crumpled to the floor . . .

He died next morning in a hospital, still resolutely declining to name his accomplices in the theft of the Karlov jewels, or to implicate his wife in the murder of Joe Fogazzaro.

"We might have prevented that, I suppose," said Jimmie Lavender.

"How could *we* know what was going to happen?" demanded Dallas. "It was obviously somebody in the audience. He timed his shot perfectly, to synchronize with the shots on the stage. It wasn't the woman. I had my eye on both of them every minute. She admitted they were at the Grand Babylon—and that's all she did admit.

"She didn't kill the Frog," said Lavender. "Her explanation of the glove in the hotel room is perfectly plausible. She handed both gloves to her husband, as they were leaving the room; he tried to put them into his pocket and dropped one. She had no idea he was going to kill the Frog—or to stuff the other glove into Joe's mouth. She came across with all the jewels but one. What more do you want?"

"Oh, probably the right man was executed," agreed Dallas. "Those three riflemen may have been the Karlov bandits, and they may not; if they keep their mouths shut, there is nothing we can do about it. But what a swell job *I* have ahead of me, trying to find the murderer of St. Croix Eastland!"

"I wish you joy of it," said Jimmie Lavender. "This is where I came in, Dallas. Thanks for everything."

That evening he contrived to pass the Frog's old newsstand for a chat with the young fellow who had succeeded Joe in the business. The boy had been very cooperative. He had given them the tip that led them to the only nightclub in the district with a magic show.

"You're Joe's brother," said Lavender in his friendly way, "and Joe was a friend of mine. You know that, don't you? I saw you in the audience last night, after you'd given us the tip on St. Croix. While Dallas was watching St. Croix and his woman, I was watching *you*. You and Joe were both in the last war, weren't you? I'll bet you were pretty good shots. . . .

"You're a swell guy, sir, but, honest, I don't know what you're talking about."

"Attaboy, Tony!" said Jimmie Lavender. "Good luck; and don't forget to feed the canary."

# you can't depend on anybody

*by . . . Patricia Highsmith*

**He would kill her about four fifteen and Lola's maid would discover the body at five. . . .**

BY FRIDAY afternoon, he knew how he would do it.

Ralph Carpenter was coming to see Lola at three on Sunday, and he'd be gone by four—definitely gone—because he had a train to catch for Massachusetts at four thirty, Lola had said. He'd go up to Lola's at about four ten, kill her with the little cat statue or anything else heavy that presented itself, leave the apartment by about four twenty and be at Joyce Gilmore's by four thirty or earlier. Then Lola's maid would arrive at five and find the body. And Ralph's fingerprints would be everywhere, on the glasses, the bottles, her cigarette lighter, the cups and saucers in case they had tea instead of a drink. Ralph was the restless type who walked around touching everything. The only thing he would wipe would be the cat statue, or whatever he used, which would be exactly what a scatterbrained young man like Ralph would do, wipe the weapon and leave his fingerprints on everything else.

The cold Lola had complained about Thursday evening at the theater had developed into a case

*Patricia Highsmith, author of* STRANGERS ON THE TRAIN, THE TALENTED MR. RIPLEY, *etc., tells the ironic story of the careful murderer who planned everything so well, but forgot one thing—that you can't always depend on people.*

of flu the next day, and Lola had announced that she was definitely staying in all weekend and not seeing anybody except Ralph who was going to pop in around three on Sunday. It had suddenly come to him—like one of those intuitive flashes that had used to come to him, quite unexpectedly after hours of futile pondering, to solve some problem in his acting—that Ralph Carpenter was exactly the person to plant it on. Even the motive was there: Ralph was going to be cut off from Lola Parsons' financial support. And the reason for that? Lola had decided to try to make a go of it again with her husband, and Claude had convinced her that it was high time Ralph Carpenter learned to stand on his own feet. For two years, Claude had been trying to stop Lola from encouraging Ralph as an actor, stop her from giving him handouts of three and five hundred dollars every few months. All their friends knew that. Their friends considered Ralph the main reason for his and Lola's separation, blaming it on Claude's jealousy of him, but that wasn't so. Why should he be jealous of a twenty-four year old weakling with a pretty face who had distinguished himself in exactly nothing since he had started his acting career at the age of twenty-one? When he, Claude Merrivale, had been only nineteen, he had given a performance as Hamlet in Philadelphia that had brought kudos from the leading critics in New York. And as for any romance between Ralph and Lola, that was absurd. Lola was twenty years older than Ralph. She toyed with him, she liked him to dance attendance on her, and Ralph played up to her. That was all.

At about five in the afternoon on Friday, Claude picked up his telephone and called the McLains. Liz and Ed McLain were old friends of his and Lola's and they lived near Lola in the Village.

"Claude! We haven't heard from you in ages!" Liz said. "Where've you been hiding?"

"Oh, I've been seeing Lola quite a bit lately. We've gone to the theater a few times."

"Oh, you *have*. Well, I'm glad to hear that. I wouldn't be surprised if you two got back together again some day. Ed's betting you will."

It gratified Claude, and touched him a little. He'd often thought that Liz and Ed preferred Lola to him and saw things Lola's way. "Well, there's a possibility," Claude said in a cheerful tone. "I was wondering if I could drop in on you Sunday afternoon? What're you doing around there?"

"I know we'll be up, anyway. Ed's up around noon and I'm one of the unemployed now, so there's no excuse for me sleep-

ing all day. Love to see you, Claude."

"How's Ed? Still plugging along in the 'Whistle'?"

"What do you mean plugging along?" Liz asked with a laugh. "Teddy's going to go to college on what Ed's made this season."

"Sorry," Claude said and bit his tongue. "Well, I'll be seeing you Sunday, Liz."

Claude reproached himself mildly, after he had hung up, for having said "plugging along," because Ed had the lead in "The Silver Whistle." His remark had sounded faintly jealous, and it reminded him unpleasantly of something Lola had said at the theater on Thursday evening. There had been a man in the play they had seen, a man of about fifty with graying hair whose acting Claude really hadn't liked, and he had said so to Lola. Then Lola, in her light, laughing tone that let her get away with murder sometimes in the things she said, had remarked, "That's the trouble with going with you to the theater. You see somebody on the stage whose part you think you could be playing, and you promptly don't like him and don't like the whole play." ("I didn't say I didn't like the whole play," Claude had protested, but Lola had been smiling, not listening to him, and the damage had been done.) It was partly true, Claude admitted. He was sour about his lack of work. Ever since he had had that automobile accident four years ago, which had left him with a limp, his luck had turned. Everybody had said how attractive and distinguished a limp would make him on the stage, and he couldn't honestly blame his limp for his lack of work, but he dated his bad luck from the time of the accident. And the quarreling with Lola had begun around that time, too. His lack of work had made him nervous, and Lola hadn't been able to understand that. How could she, since she'd never had to worry one day of her life about money? She'd been glamorous, blonde-and-blue-eyed Lola Parsons from twenty to thirty-nine, and when her beauty had begun to fade, she had just quit the stage and gone on living on her income. She'd never known what it was to watch your good looks fading with time, and to watch your roles and your reputation dwindling at the same rate. Finally, two years ago, she had told him that he was so "sour on the world" that he didn't deserve a job, and so disagreeable to live with that she didn't care to live with him any longer. Most men would have tried to improve, Claude supposed, but he'd had his pride. He had left their apartment in the Village and had taken a small place of his own in the East Seventies. His life hadn't been easy for the past

two years. Lola had offered him money from time to time, but he'd been too proud to take it—except once or twice, perhaps. He'd had only two small parts in all that time, and he had pawned every piece of jewelry he owned. Lots of people promised him work, casting directors and enthusiastic producers, but the parts had never materialized. Claude had had his hopes dashed so often, he had come to believe that you couldn't depend on anybody. It was a part of his credo now that you couldn't depend on anybody, and sour or not, it was a fact, he thought.

Six months ago, he had felt he couldn't stand his poverty any longer — not with watching Ralph Carpenter unblushingly taking almost three thousand a year from Lola—and he had asked Lola if he could come back to her, but she had gently and politely said no. After a few months' sulking, Claude had called her up and said, "We can still be friends and see each other now and then, can't we?" "Of course, Claude," Lola had said. "You're the one who always wants to cut things off." "Well, I've changed," he had said. So he had begun to see her once a week or so, just to get a general idea of the way she lived now, because he had decided to kill her if he could think of an absolutely safe way. He didn't want to be kept by an estranged wife the rest of his life. He had expensive tastes, and he wanted to live out the remaining years of his life in style, and on money that he had in his own name. Years ago Lola had made her will, leaving all her money to him, and he was sure she hadn't changed it in the last two years. She wasn't that logical a woman. He remembered, five or six years ago, what a difficult time he'd had in getting her to make a will at all. Legal red tape bored her. And besides, he had asked her sarcastically in one of their arguments just before he moved out of the house, if she was going to change her will, and she had answered indifferently, "Of course not. I wouldn't bother."

He had learned in the last two months that she still saw the same old friends, that there were no new men friends who might be called romantic interests, that she still kept late hours and often entertained theater people after midnight, and that she had a young French maid named Cosette who came every day except Monday at five P.M. and generally stayed until midnight.

One thing Claude was certain of about Lola: she didn't discuss their private affairs with her friends. Therefore, when he told the McLains and Joyce Gilmore and perhaps a few other people that Lola and he were going to live together again, people would believe him. But he'd better not

tell anybody before Sunday afternoon, Claude thought, or someone might call up Lola to congratulate her about it.

Claude called Joyce on Saturday and asked if he could drop by around four, since he was going to be in her neighborhood. Joyce said, "Of course, Claude!" just as Claude had thought she would. Joyce Gilmore was a twenty-two year old girl from Atlanta, stage-struck, ambitious, and blessed with a modest allowance from home. Joyce had heard of both Lola Parsons and Claude Merrivale as a child, and to know them both personally, to be on a first-name-calling basis with them, was a glamorous experience for her.

Claude got to the McLains' a little after three on Sunday, at just the time Ralph Carpenter should have been arriving at Lola's, he thought. The McLains gave him iced coffee and crumb-cake—they had remembered that he was especially fond of crumb-cake—but Claude only sipped at the coffee, because he was jumpy enough.

"What's this I hear about you and Lola?" Ed asked. "Are you really patching things up?"

Claude smiled and pulled his fingertips down the bridge of his nose, an old stage trick of his when he wished to appear shy or embarrassed. "As I said to Liz, it's a possibility. A little more than that, I think."

"I'm delighted, Claude," Ed said heartily. "What a shame she isn't here today, too!"

"She's down with a touch of flu, you know," Claude said. "Besides, she's seeing Ralph Carpenter this afternoon. I think Lola wants to have a private talk with him."

"Oh, yes, her protégé. What's he doing lately?" Ed asked.

"Nothing much, as usual. He's off to Massachusetts for a job in summer stock. He says it's a job, I don't know." Claude's tone made the job highly dubious. "I think I've convinced Lola that she's been backing the wrong horse, and she's going to break the news to him this afternoon that he's not getting any more money. I hope it doesn't hit him too hard."

"Has she really been giving him so much?" Liz asked.

"Nearly five thousand a year!" Claude said. "Not that I don't believe in helping the budding young actor, but this one! *He* doesn't plod the streets looking for work. He hangs around bars in New York and Philadelphia, listening to hot pianists and taking girls out on Lola's money. I've had reports, so I know. I told Lola that if I was going to be the man of the house again, this kind of thing'd have to stop."

"I'm sorry to hear he wastes his time," Liz said. "I must say the couple of times I've met him

I thought he was pretty serious."

Claude said nothing for a moment.

The conversation turned to a new play which was starting to cast for a fall opening, a tragedy about a business tycoon whose fortune slowly declined. Ed said that the part was made for an actor like himself—Claude Merrivale—and why didn't Claude see what he could do about getting it?

Claude chuckled. "Nonsense. I've retired or haven't you noticed? I'm content to live out my life as an observer of the theater. As long as I can continue to live decently on my little nest egg, I'm happy. No heirs. What've I got to worry about?" Claude always implied that he had more money than he actually possessed, and also that he strongly objected to taking any of his wife's money, even when he had lived with her.

At five of four by the McLains' clock, Claude stood up to leave. The McLains urged him to stay.

"No, I promised Joyce Gilmore I'd drop in on her around four. I want to go by Eighth Street and pick up my favorite pipe tobacco, too."

Claude went down the two flights of stairs and out the door into Charles Street. Three minutes of four. Lola's apartment was about six blocks from here, and Joyce's four blocks from Lola's. He began to walk at a leisurely pace toward Lola's house in Grove Street, taking a way that Ralph would probably not be taking if he were in search of a taxi or on his way to the Christopher Street subway station. Claude walked along the west side of Bleecker Street, and just as he came within a few feet of the corner that turned into Grove Street, he saw Ralph Carpenter trotting along the other side of Grove Street in the direction of Seventh Avenue, his head down, a seersucker jacket slung over one shoulder. He was late. Claude hoped he made his train, otherwise he might come right back to Lola's.

About a minute later, Claude rang Lola's bell. She pressed the buzzer immediately. Claude climbed the stairs. Lola lived at the top.

"Ralph?" she called down. "Forget something?"

"No, it's me. Mind if I come up?"

"Claude?" She leaned over the stairwell. "Well, this is a surprise. Happy Sunday!" She'd used to say "Happy Sunday" every Sunday morning at breakfast when they had lived together.

"Hot Sunday," Claude remarked, looking her up and down as he reached the hall level. She was wearing her pink taffeta dressing gown, its full sleeves held tight at the wrists

with a pair of flat silver bracelets that he had given her on one of her birthdays years ago. Her hair made a great golden puff around her bright blue-eyed face.

"Ralph just left," she said. "We've been out on the terrace trying to catch a breeze. Want to go out? It's cooler out there."

"No, not particularly," he said, though the little terrace, he remembered, was absolutely secluded and Lola often took nude sunbaths out there in summer. Claude looked at the alabaster cat sitting on the mantel, then at the terrace where on the little table in front of the glider there stood a dubonnet bottle and a soda bottle, two glasses, the ice bucket, and Lola's silver table lighter that Ralph surely would have touched. He hadn't much time.

"What's the matter?" Lola asked. "You look stiff as a poker. What happened?"

"Nothing," Claude said, moving restlessly toward the terrace. His eyes alighted on a weather-beaten croquet mallet in a corner of the terrace, better than the cat statue, he thought, assuming that the quarrel had started on the terrace. He glanced at his watch. Then he went to the corner of the terrace and picked up the mallet. He approached Lola with the mallet handle in his right hand, the head of the mallet resting in his left. "How's Ralph?" he asked her.

"Wonderful." Lola smiled her happy smile. "Very enthusiastic about his summer job. He's—"

He brought the mallet down above her horrified eyes, squarely on her forehead, and struck her another blow on the top of the head as she fell. Her forehead was bleeding, down into the green rug. He felt for her pulse, first in her plump wrist, then in her warm soft throat. He couldn't feel a ,. He wiped the croquet mallet thoroughly with his handkerchief and dropped it on the floor. Then he picked up her wrist again. He was sure there was no pulse. He felt sickened suddenly, and if he had had to hit her again, he thought, he wouldn't have been able. Then he glanced around the room, though he was too nervous to see anything except the familiar untidiness of Lola before a maid was due to arrive. He wiped his sweating forehead with the handkerchief, and made his way to the door. He wiped both knobs carefully with the handkerchief, made sure there was nobody on the stairs, then went down. He wiped the brass knobs of the front doors also, and her bell which he had pressed.

He took off his jacket as he walked toward Joyce Gilmore's house, trying to combine haste—because it was already sixteen past four—with cooling and calming himself before he saw Joyce.

Joyce greeted him warmly. "Oh, Claude, it's so nice to *see* you! How've you been? I've got news! I *might* get a job as a prop girl in Kennebunkport this summer, if the girl who's got the job now gets married and I think she's going to! What do you think of that?"

Claude expressed the appropriate congratulations, then said: "I've got a bit of news myself. Lola and I've decided to bury the hatchet. It's not positive yet, but I think so," he added with a smile.

"Oh, good! Lola's *so* nice. You are, too. I don't know either of you too well," Joyce said modestly, "but anyway I'm glad you've decided to get back together again."

"Thanks," Claude said. He knew Joyce liked Lola immensely, because Lola had given her a lot of her time, coaching her, showing her how to use her voice.

Joyce had made iced coffee for him, too. Claude would have liked a brandy, but Joyce never had any liquor. He looked at his watch. Seven minutes to five. Cosette was very punctual, Lola had told him. He stayed at Joyce's until a little after five, while she talked about her job prospects for the fall that did not interest him at all, then he took his leave.

Before he started home, he went to a cigar store in Eighth Street and bought the packet of special tobacco that he had mentioned to the McLains, so he could produce it if he were ever asked. Joyce had been in such a good humor when he arrived, she hadn't noticed his apology for being a little late, he thought. Between the McLains and Joyce Gilmore, he considered his afternoon well accounted for. He walked to Fifth Avenue and caught the bus uptown.

He expected to be called within an hour, but by six o'clock his telephone had not rung. He thought of going to a movie, an innocent thing to do on a Sunday evening, but his curiosity kept him at home. Why didn't the phone ring?

The telephone was silent all evening.

It would be in the papers tomorrow morning, he thought. Cosette or the police just hadn't thought him close enough to Lola to call him at once. Or maybe the police were off in pursuit of Ralph Carpenter. Lola would have written hi name in her appointment book. She always did put down her appointments.

But it wasn't in the newspapers the next morning. Claude couldn't understand it. It was impossible that the police would hush up the murder of a woman as well-known as Lola Parsons.

Hadn't Cosette come yesterday? She always worked Sundays,

he remembered. Monday was her day off. Claude frowned, puzzled. He supposed it was possible she hadn't come yesterday, and if so she probably wouldn't come today either.

Claude remembered that Cosette's name was something like Ducharne or Duchesne and that she lived on the West Side. He found a Janette Duchesne in the West Eighties — perhaps her mother or her sister—and dialed the number. He had guessed right. A woman with a French accent answered the phone, and then Cosette came on.

"Hello, Cosette. This is Claude Merrivale," Claude said. "I was wondering if you could come to work today, even though it is your day off, because Madame is not feeling well. She has a little flu, you know. In fact, I'm a bit worried because her phone doesn't answer, and she really shouldn't go out in her condition."

"Ah, monsieur, I am so sorry. I told Madame Sunday that I could not come, because I was malade with the same flu, I think. And today I am really worse. But I have explained to Madame. Tomorrow I surely come. But today I must stay in because the doctor is coming this afternoon to look at me." She paused to blow her nose. "Pardonnez-moi, monsieur."

"Yes, but—you don't think you could possibly go down today? I'm worried because her phone doesn't answer. I haven't the key, you know."

"Oh," Cosette said without surprise. "Perhaps she has gone to stay with a friend since I cannot come, monsieur. Perhaps she is with her cousin."

"That's an idea," Claude said. "All right, I'll try her cousin. But you'll surely be there tomorrow?"

"Bien sure, monsieur. I hope Madame is better. Au revoir, monsieur."

Claude hung up, thwarted. He shrugged. Tomorrow then. The fingerprints would still be there.

He suddenly remembered that Joyce had said she was going to Lola's at twelve on Tuesday for a diction lesson. Tomorrow morning then at twelve. Lola wouldn't answer, and then Joyce would call up the McLains, probably, to see if Lola were with them, then call him. She was that kind of girl, and she took her diction lessons very seriously. He would tell Joyce that he was worried because Lola hadn't answered her telephone, and didn't she think they should get the superintendent to open the apartment? That was it.

Claude went to bed that evening and passed his second restless night.

There was nothing in the papers about Lola Tuesday morning, either. Claude had hoped

that Lola might have had an appointment with someone Monday evening, someone who would have been persistent enough to find out where she was, even to demand that the door be opened. He supposed that was too much to expect. At any rate, it hadn't happened.

Noon came and went, and there was no telephone call from Joyce. Then at a quarter of one the telephone rang. It was Cosette.

" 'Ello, Monsieur Merrivale. I call to tell you that I cannot come today after all. The doctor says I have some flu, and that I must stay in bed until Thursday. I tell you, because I cannot reach Madame. She does not answer."

Claude's teeth set. He wanted to curse. You couldn't depend on anybody! "All right, Cosette," he said unsympathetically. "I'll tell her."

"I am so sorry. I will surely be there on Thursday. But surely. My deepest apologies, monsieur."

Claude called up Joyce Gilmore. Joyce was in. Claude spoke to her as if he hadn't remembered that she was to go to Lola's at twelve. He had a pretext for calling her, an expensive one: would she like to see "One Fine Day" with him on Thursday night? He wouldn't have to buy the tickets, he thought, because Lola's body would have been found by then.

"I'd love to go, Claude. Thanks. It's not a very good play, though, is it?"

"No, but there's not much choice this time of year. Uh—weren't you supposed to see Lola today, by the way?"

"Yes, but she wasn't in. I went over at twelve. You know the way she is. She doesn't always remember even when she writes something down."

"I hope she's all right. I haven't been able to reach her since—since Sunday morning, I think. Frankly, I'm a little worried."

"Oh, I wouldn't worry. She probably made a lunch date and forgot all about our date. I'll call her back around three or four."

"But seriously, Joyce, I'm thinking of getting the superintendent to open the apartment. Would you go over to Lola's with me if I came down now?"

"I've got a date at a quarter of two about this Kennebunkport job, Claude. I wouldn't be so worried, because if she's well enough to go out, she must be all right. I've got to go and dress now. Call me before Thursday and we'll arrange a time. Or I'll call you. Thanks a million, Claude. Bye bye."

"Bye bye," he said weakly.

He'd have to get the superintendent himself and barge in, he supposed. A husband would be expected to be that concerned

after two days. But he dreaded facing it. It'd be so much easier to send somebody else in, like Joyce or the McLains. He decided to call the McLains as well as Lola's cousin before he called the superintendent. It'd look much better.

He dialed the McLains' number. They didn't answer.

Then he called Lola's cousin, Mrs. Alice Haney, who lived near Gramercy Park. After the preliminary "How are yous" and "It's been so longs," which Claude felt were rather cool on her part, he asked if Lola were there.

"No, she isn't," Alice said.

"She doesn't answer her telephone and I don't know where she is. She's sick, you know, down with the flu. I'm rather worried about her."

"Oh, she probably went off to stay with some friend for a couple of days. I didn't know she was sick. Nobody likes to be alone when they're sick, you know."

Claude waited, but Alice was not saying anything more. "All right. I'll do it myself," he murmured. "Thanks, Alice. Good bye."

They hung up.

*I'll leave it up to you.* Damn her, anyway. You couldn't even depend on a cousin!

He'd wait until tomorrow to call the superintendent, he thought. Something might still happen tonight.

Claude went out to look at the newsstand on Lexington Avenue, hoping that there'd be a new tabloid edition with a headline about Lola. There wasn't. He bought a paper, anyway, the morning's *Herald-Tribune,* and stood on the sidewalk for a moment, looking absently over the front page. The paper was predicting rain tomorrow, he noticed. He looked up at the sky. There was not much sun, but it didn't look like rain. He walked back toward his apartment, drawn by his telephone. He hoped it did rain. It'd cool things off a bit.

As soon as he entered his apartment, he realized something: rain would wash the fingerprints off the terrace—if it were a really hard rain. He'd better talk to the superintendent today.

Claude set to work finding him. He didn't know the superintendent's last name, only that he was called Joe and lived in the house next door. He called the real estate agency that owned Lola's building and asked for the telephone number of the superintendent called Joe who took care of Lola's building in Grove Street. The superintendent's name was Donovan, the agency said, and they gave Claude his telephone number.

Claude was lucky enough to find Joe at home.

"Listen," Claude said, "I'm very concerned about a tenant in thirty-seven and a half. Miss Lola Parsons. She hasn't answered her telephone since Sunday. Would you be good enough to open her apartment door and see if everything's all right?"

"Miss Parsons? If she don't want to answer her bell, she don't answer it. She gets people coming by all hours of the night. She don't always let them in." Joe sounded as if he were chewing something.

"Yes, but this is different. It's been going on for two days. This is her husband, Claude Merrivale. Remember me? I used to live there."

"Um-m," Joe said as if he weren't sure whether to believe him or not. "She's probably away for a few days. She goes away sometimes."

"But I happen to know—" Claude stopped. No use going into Lola's flu. "You will go in, won't you? That's all I want to know. I want you to look in today."

"All right, I will," Joe said.

Claude couldn't tell if he meant it or not. "Please do. It's urgent. I'll call back a little later to check with you," he said firmly.

"Okay."

"Thank you very much, Joe. Good-bye."

Claude paced his floor. He looked out at the sky. A patch of sunlight through the drifting white clouds cheered him. A good thing fingerprints didn't evaporate, he thought. But suppose the rain came earlier than tomorrow, in a couple of hours, before the superintendent got there? He wasn't sure Ralph's fingerprints would be anywhere else but on the terrace. They *might* be, but how could he be sure? Maybe his own fingerprints were on a few things in the living room, too, left over from Thursday night. Incredible that nobody was concerned, that a corpse could lie for nearly forty-eight hours in an apartment without anybody's knowing it! Claude paced the floor until after four o'clock, then he called Joe back.

"He ain't here," a woman's voice said.

"When will he be back?" I asked.

"He ain't coming back till late. Maybe nine o'clock. He's got a big plumbing job to do over on Perry Street." The woman's voice was shrill and uncooperative.

Claude sighed. "All right. Tell him Mr. Merrivale called and that I'll call him back after nine."

"Who?"

"Merrivale. M-e-r-r-i-v-a-l-e. Miss Parsons' husband." He hung up, wiped the sweat from

his forehead, and poured himself a brandy.

At nine fifteen that evening he tried Joe again. Joe was not home yet, and it was clear from Mrs. Donovan's tone that she had no intention of making her husband open an apartment for no good reason after he'd been working late, anyway.

Claude went to bed, exhausted yet unable to fall asleep. At least it wasn't raining, but the evening papers all forecast rain "late tomorrow afternoon."

Wednesday arrived, cloudy and hot. Claude called Joe very early, but not early enough because Joe was already out on his rounds. Mrs. Donovan promised to tell him about Miss Parsons' apartment when he came in for lunch, and Claude said he would call again at lunchtime, too.

He called again at one o'clock. Joe wasn't coming home for lunch today, his wife said, and she didn't know where he was at the moment.

Claude was at a loss. He turned on his tiny radio and tried to get a weather report. After half an hour, he found one.

". . . That rain that we've all been praying for may yet materialize this afternoon. Cooler winds from Canada are on the way, and when they hit this blanket of heat that's been hanging over New York for the past six days—*Boy!* That's when most of you, I imagine, will say, 'What a relief!' And my guess is that you'll head for the refrigerator to get a bottle of America's finest beer—*Br*—" Claude turned it off. He began to bite his nails.

He tried the McLains again. A strange voice answered, a sleepy male voice.

"Hello. I'd like to speak to Liz, please," Claude said.

"Oh—uh—Liz is away until Sunday. Out of town."

"Is Ed there?"

"Ed's staying with a friend of his uptown. They lent their apartment to me and my wife for a few days. Would you like Ed's phone number?"

Claude hesitated. It was all too complicated. "No. No, thanks. I'll call later."

He was shaking. Today was *Wednesday*. He poured another brandy and looked out at the sky. The clouds were milling, slowly.

He tried Joe again at four and at five. The telephone didn't answer. He verified the number with information. The phone still didn't answer.

But the rain held off. Dusk fell. The radio reports bemoaned the aborted rainfall. Claude smiled in triumph. It was blowing over, he thought. And tomorrow Cosette would arrive.

Thursday. Hotter and muggier than ever, but the sun was penetrating a little, like a weak electric light in a steamy bathroom. The weather report that

Claude caught at seven thirty, however, guaranteed rain by mid-afternoon.

". . . This time it's for real, friends. So take your raincoat over your arm when you go off to work today. Every weather observation station on the North Eastern seaboard is predicting rain and plenty of it to cool the sweltering cities of the entire Northeast . . ."

Claude called Joe immediately after hearing that.

"Listen, mister," Joe said, "I'm getting a little tired of this. I've got a lot of things to do besides disturb somebody who doesn't want to be disturbed . . . Oh, yeah? Well, maybe you don't know Miss Parsons as well as I do . . . No, sir. I'm sorry. G'bye." He hung up.

Claude got dressed mechanically and went out to get the papers. He couldn't bear to look at the weather reports. The air was so humid the moisture seemed to condense on his face as he walked. All the sky needed, he thought, was a bolt of lightning. Just as he re-entered his house, he heard a growl of thunder. Nine fifteen. Could it possibly hold off until five? He'd call Cosette, he decided, and ask her to come earlier.

Before he got to his phone, it rang.

"Hello, Claude!" an energetic young voice cried. "This is Peter Parsons. Do you happen to know where Lola is? How are you, anyway?"

"Peter! For goodness' sake! When did you—"

"I'm just passing through. Sailing this afternoon for Europe. I thought I'd crash in on my old aunt and maybe have lunch with her, but I can't get an answer at her place. I wanted to borrow a suitcase from her, too. Do you think she could be sleeping through the phone?"

"No, I don't. I've been trying to ring her, too, for the last—well, for a couple of days. Why don't you go down there and hammer on the door? Matter of fact, I've asked the superintendent to look into her apartment, but he hasn't done it yet, so you might ask him to if you want the suitcase. His name's Donovan, and he lives in the house next door to the left of Lola's as you face it. I'll call him and tell him you're coming right down."

"Okay, but I can't get down there till about twelve. I've got some shopping to do. Thanks, Claude. Bye bye."

"Listen!"

"What?"

"Let me know if you reach her, will you? I'm really quite concerned."

"Why?"

"Because I can't reach her, either!"

"Oh. Okay, Claude. I'll let you know."

Claude gave a sigh of relief.

Peter would get into the house all right. He was a very determined young man. He picked up the phone and dialed Joe's number, which he knew by heart now. Joe was there. Claude told him that Miss Parsons' nephew was coming down around twelve to pick up a suitcase, and would he please let him into Miss Parsons' apartment?

"I'm not gonna be here at twelve," Joe said.

"Can't you leave the key with your wife?"

"I don't know this nephew," Joe said. "How do I know he's her nephew? I couldn't let him take anything out of the apartment. No, sir!"

For a moment, Claude thought of going down himself, waiting for Peter and insisting that the door be opened, then he realized he couldn't face it. Not after all this time. This delay was wearing at his nerves. "I asked you to go into the apartment yesterday," Claude said in an angry tone. "You didn't do it. I'm asking you to go in immediately! *Now!*"

"Why?"

"I've got to know if everything's all right there!"

"Everything's all right."

Claude started to say something, then slammed the telephone down on the hook. "Superintendents," he muttered. "Not one in New York who earns his pay."

He waited. The phone rang at eleven thirty. It was Joyce, calling to arrange a meeting place. Claude couldn't think of anything, so he let Joyce suggest a certain restaurant on Eighth Avenue, which she said was fairly close to the theater. As he put the phone down, he heard a businesslike rumble of thunder.

It was quite dark in his room. Claude turned the light on and paced the floor. At twelve thirty, he called Joe again. Joe was out, and his wife hung up on him.

One o'clock. Two o'clock. The rain was still holding off. There was no call from Peter or from the police. Claude guessed what must have happened: Peter had rung the doorbell and gotten no answer, had found the superintendent out, and had just not bothered calling him back. Irresponsibility!

Maybe the rain would hold off until after five, he thought. If it had held off this long, why shouldn't it hold off three more hours? The brandies lifted his spirits. He made himself sit down with his glass of brandy and ice and deliberately tried to calm himself, tried to convince himself that it wouldn't rain until six or so, that Cosette would immediately call the police when she found the body at five, that the police would tell her not to touch a thing, and that she would not start tidying up the terrace while waiting for the police to arrive.

Suddenly there was a mighty clap of thunder that made Claude splash the brandy out of his glass, and then the rain came. Within seconds, it was pounding down, and there was a gusty wind in it that would certainly blow over the highball glasses, if not the little table, Claude thought. He swallowed dryly, picturing the glasses broken, the bottles rolling about on the terrace, and every square inch of their surface washed clean of fingerprints.

The rain lasted until after four, then dwindled to a sprinkle. Claude lay down on his bed and put his pillow over his head.

Five o'clock came, then five thirty. Claude was almost reaching for the phone to call Cosette at Lola's—he thought it would seem perfectly normal to call—when the telephone rang. He let it ring three times before he picked it up and said in an easy voice, "Yes?"

"Is this Claude Merrivale?"

"Yes."

"This is Detective Greenley, City Police. Would you come down to your wife's apartment right away, please?"

"What's the trouble? Is she all right? I've been trying—"

"She's not all right. She's been murdered, Mr. Merrivale. Can you come down right away?"

"Certainly. Of course," Claude said in a muted tone.

Claude took another slug of brandy and left his house. There just *might* be some fingerprints left on the terrace, he thought, or there might be some prints of Ralph's in the living room. It was going to be so hard to establish *when* she was killed—

When Claude arrived, there were four or five men in the living room. Lola's body lay where he had last seen it on the floor, partly covered now by a blanket. Cosette sat crumpled in a chair, weeping.

"Who're you?" a policeman asked him.

"I'm her husband," Claude said with dignity. "Claude Merrivale." He saw that his name made no impression on them.

They began to ask him questions. When had he last seen her? He did not live with her? Did he have any idea who might have killed her?

"I know that a young man visited her Sunday afternoon, a young man to whom she had been giving money," Claude said coolly. "I haven't been able to reach my wife all week. I've been extremely worried."

"Who is the young man?" a detective asked.

"His name is Ralph Carpenter. He claims he wants to be an actor and my wife's been giving him money from time to time to live on. But I happen to know that my wife told him on Sunday that she was not going to give him any more money in future.

I think it's possible," Claude went on, sidling toward the door so he could see the terrace, "knowing Ralph Carpenter as I do, that he could have killed her in a burst of anger. He's like that." Claude saw that the terrace was a shambles of broken glasses, overturned bottles, cigarette stubs, and that no one was trying to get any fingerprints from the glass fragments. The glider was soaked.

"Pretty much messed up by the rain this afternoon," the detective said. "Or else they had a fight out here. Can't get any prints out here, anyway."

So much for the terrace, Claude thought.

"Mind if we take your fingerprints, Mr. Merrivale?" the detective asked.

"Certainly not." Claude submitted to having his fingertips pressed down on an ink pad and then onto a tablet of paper.

The detective carried the tablet over to the mantel. One of Lola's silver bracelets was on the mantel, Claude saw. The detective was comparing, through a magnifying glass, the prints on the paper with some white powdered prints on the bracelet. Claude shuddered. He remembered holding one of the bracelets up a little when he felt—

"How's that thumb look?" another detective asked.

"This is it," said the detective at the mantel. He turned to Claude. "How do you explain that your thumbprint is on her bracelet when you haven't seen her since Thursday night? The maid saw her on Saturday. Isn't that right, Miss Duchesne?"

"That is right, monsieur."

Claude felt naked. So much for his well-calculated alibis. So much for his efforts to get *somebody* into the apartment before it was too late. If not for the rain, they'd have gotten the prints off the terrace and never even thought of looking at the bracelets!

"Mr. Merrivale?" the detective prompted. "Maybe you'll feel like talking a little more when you get to headquarters?"

"I'm perfectly willing to go there," Claude said in a poised tone and straightened his shoulders. He followed the detective, his head up.

But he'd break down at the police station, he knew. He couldn't go on with the lies about Ralph. Now he'd never get any of Lola's income or her bank account. He'd end his life as a murderer. It was people who'd let him down, starting with Cosette, starting with Joyce who hadn't been interested enough to do anything. *People!*

Claude had been muttering to himself. Now he said out loud, and with conviction, "You can't depend on *anybody!* That's what I said!" And then he climbed into the car.

# problem at pollensa bay

*by . . . Agatha Christie*

Haven't you ever suffered from an attack of madeleinitis? . . .

THE steamer from Barcelona to Majorca landed Mr. Parker Pyne at Palma in the early hours of the morning—and straightaway he met with disillusionment. The hotels were full! The best that could be done for him was an airless cupboard overlooking an inner court in a hotel in the center of the town—and with that Mr. Parker Pyne was not prepared to put up. The proprietor of the hotel was indifferent to his disappointment.

"What will you?" he observed with a shrug.

Palma was popular now after all! The exchange was favorable! Everyone—the English, the Americans—all came to Majorca in the winter. The whole place was crowded. It was doubtful if the English gentleman would be able to get in anywhere—except perhaps at Formentor where the prices were so ruinous that even foreigners blanched at them.

Mr. Parker Pyne partook of some coffee and a roll and went out to view the cathedral, but

"ARE YOU HAPPY? IF NOT, CONSULT MR. PARKER PYNE," *read the advertisements. Agatha Christie, one of the great ladies of British literature, introduces us to another adventure of the famous Mr. Parker Pyne, the Mr. Pyne whose unorthodox methods had saved the lives or reason of so many. . . .*



Copyright, 1936, by Agatha Christie
Reprinted by permission of Harold Ober Associates

found himself in no mood for appreciating the beauties of architecture.

He next had a conference with a friendly taxi driver in inadequate French interlarded with native Spanish, and they discussed the merits and possibilities of Soller, Alcudia, Pollensa and Formentor—where there were fine hotels but very expensive.

Mr. Parker Pyne was goaded to inquire how expensive.

They asked, said the taxi driver, an amount that it would be absurd and ridiculous to pay —was it not well known that the English came here because prices were cheap and reasonable?

Mr. Parker Pyne said that that was quite so, but all the same what sums did they charge at Formentor?

A price incredible!

Perfectly — but W H A T PRICE EXACTLY?

The driver consented at last to reply in terms of figures.

Fresh from the exactions of hotels in Jerusalem and Egypt, the figure did not stagger Mr. Parker Pyne unduly.

A bargain was struck, Mr. Parker Pyne's suitcases were loaded on the taxi in a somewhat haphazard manner, and they started off to drive round the island, trying cheaper hostelries en route but with the final objective of Formentor.

But they never reached that final abode of plutocracy, for after they had passed through the narrow streets of Pollensa and were following the curved line of the seashore, they came to the Hotel Pino d'Oro—a small hotel standing on the edge of the sea looking out over a view that in the misty haze of a fine morning had the exquisite vagueness of a Japanese print. At once Mr. Parker Pyne knew that this, and this only, was what he was looking for. He stopped the taxi, passed through the painted gate with the hope that he would find a resting place.

The elderly couple to whom the hotel belonged knew no English or French. Nevertheless the matter was concluded satisfactorily. Mr. Parker Pyne was allotted a room overlooking the sea, the suitcases were unloaded, the driver congratulated his passenger upon avoiding the monstrous exigencies of "these new hotels," received his fare and departed with a cheerful Spanish salutation.

Mr. Parker Pyne glanced at his watch and perceiving that it was, even now, but a quarter to ten, went out onto the small terrace now bathed in a dazzling morning light and ordered, for the second time that morning, coffee and rolls.

There were four tables there, his own, one from which break-

fast was being cleared away and two occupied ones. At the one nearest him sat a family of father and mother and two elderly daughters — Germans. Beyond them, at the corner of the terrace, sat what were clearly an English mother and son.

The woman was about fifty-five. She had gray hair of a pretty tone—was sensibly but not fashionably dressed in a tweed coat and skirt—and had that comfortable self-possession which marks an Englishwoman used to much traveling abroad.

The young man who sat opposite her might have been twenty-five and he too was typical of his class and age. He was neither good-looking nor plain, tall nor short. He was clearly on the best of terms with his mother—they made little jokes together—and he was assiduous in passing her things.

As they talked, her eye met that of Mr. Parker Pyne. It passed over him with well-bred nonchalance, but he knew that he had been assimilated *and* labeled.

He had been recognized as English and doubtless, in due course, some pleasant non-committal remark would be addressed to him.

Mr. Parker Pyne had no particular objection. His own countrymen and women abroad were inclined to bore him slightly, but he was quite willing to pass the time of day in an amiable manner. In a small hotel it caused constraint if one did not do so. This particular woman, he felt sure, had excellent "hotel manners," as he put it.

The English boy rose from his seat, made some laughing remark and passed into the hotel. The woman took her letters and bags and settled herself in a chair facing the sea. She unfolded a copy of the *Continental Daily Mail*. Her back was to Mr. Parker Pyne.

As he drank the last drop of his coffee, Mr. Parker Pyne glanced in her direction, and instantly he stiffened. He was alarmed—alarmed for the peaceful continuance of his holiday! That back was horribly expressive. In his time he had classified many such backs. Its rigidity—the tenseness of its poise—without seeing her face he knew well enough that the eyes were bright with unshed tears—that the woman was keeping herself in hand by a rigid effort.

Moving warily, like a much-hunted animal, Mr. Parker Pyne retreated into the hotel. Not half an hour before he had been invited to sign his name in the book lying on the desk. There it was—a neat signature—C. Parker Pyne, London.

A few lines above Mr. Parker Pyne noticed the entries: Mrs. R. Chester, Mr. Basil Chester—Holm Park, Devon.

Seizing a pen, Mr. Parker Pyne wrote rapidly over his signature. It now read (with difficulty) Christopher Pyne.

If Mrs. R. Chester was unhappy in Pollensa Bay, it was not going to be made easy for her to consult Mr. Parker Pyne.

Already it had been a source of abiding wonder to that gentleman that so many people he had come across abroad should know his name and have noted his advertisements. In England many thousands of people read the *Times* every day and could have answered quite truthfully that they had never heard such a name in their lives. Abroad, he reflected, they read their newspapers more thoroughly. No item, not even the advertisement columns, escaped them.

Already his holidays had been interrupted on several occasions. He had dealt with a whole series of problems from murder to attempted blackmail. He was determined he'd have peace in Majorca, and felt instinctively that a distressed mother might trouble that peace considerably.

Mr. Parker Pyne settled down at the Pino d'Oro very happily. There was a larger hotel not far off, the Mariposa, where a good many English people stayed. There was also quite an artist colony living all round. You could walk along by the sea to the fishing village where there was a cocktail bar where people met—there were a few shops. It was all very peaceful and pleasant. Girls strolled about in trousers with brightly colored handkerchiefs tied round the upper halves of their bodies. Young men in berets with rather long hair held forth in "Mac's Bar" on such subjects as plastic values and abstraction in art.

On the day after Mr. Parker Pyne's arrival, Mrs. Chester made a few conventional remarks to him on the subject of the view and the likelihood of the weather keeping fine. She then chatted a little with the German lady about knitting, and had a few pleasant words about the sadness of the political situation with two Danish gentlemen who spent their time rising at dawn and walking for eleven hours.

Mr. Parker Pyne found Basil Chester a most likeable young man. He called Mr. Parker Pyne "sir" and listened most politely to anything the older man said. Sometimes the three English people had coffee together after dinner in the evening. After the third day, Basil left the party after ten minutes or so and Mr. Parker Pyne was left tête-á-tête with Mrs. Chester.

They talked about flowers and the growing of them, of the lamentable state of the English pound and of how expensive France has become, and of the

difficulty of getting good afternoon tea.

Every evening when her son departed, Mr. Parker Pyne saw the quickly concealed tremor of her lips, but immediately she recovered and discoursed pleasantly on the above-mentioned subjects.

Little by little she began to talk of Basil—of how well he had done at school—"he was in the first XI, you know"—of how everyone liked him, of how proud his father would have been of the boy had he lived, of how thankful she had been that Basil had never been "wild." "Of course I always urge him to be with young people, but he really seems to prefer being with me."

She said it with a kind of nice modest pleasure in the fact.

But for once Mr. Parker Pyne did not make the usual tactful response he could usually achieve so easily. He said instead:

"Oh! well, there seem to be plenty of young people here—not in the hotel, but roundabout."

At that, he noticed, Mrs. Chester stiffened. She said: Of course there were a lot of Artists. Perhaps she was very old-fashioned—real art, of course, was different, but a lot of young people just made that sort of thing an excuse for lounging about and doing nothing—and the girls drank a lot too much.

On the following day Basil said to Mr. Parker Pyne:

"I'm awfully glad you turned up here, sir—especially for my mother's sake. She likes having you to talk to in the evenings."

"What did you do when you were first here?"

"As a matter of fact we used to play piquet."

"I see."

"Of course one gets rather tired of piquet. As a matter of fact I've got some friends here—frightfully cheery crowd. I don't really think my mother approves of them." He laughed as though he felt this ought to be amusing. "The mater's very old-fashioned. . . . Even girls in trousers shock her!"

"Quite so," said Mr. Parker Pyne.

"What I tell her is . . . one's got to move with the times. . . . The girls at home round us are frightfully dull. . . ."

"I see," said Mr. Parker Pyne.

All this interested him well enough. He was a spectator of a miniature drama, but he was not called upon to take part in it.

And then the worst, from Mr. Parker Pyne's point of view, happened. A gushing lady of his acquaintance came to stay at the Mariposa. They met in the tea shop in the presence of Mrs. Chester.

The new-comer screamed:

"Why—if it isn't Mr. Parker Pyne—the one and only Mr. Parker Pyne! And Adela Chester! Do you know each other? Oh, you do? You're staying at the same hotel? He's the one and only original wizard, Adela, the marvel of the country, all your troubles smoothed out while you wait! What? Didn't you know? You must have heard about him? Haven't you read his advertisements? Are you in trouble? Consult Mr. Parker Pyne. There's just nothing he can't do. Husbands and wives flying at each other's throats and he brings 'em together—if you've lost interest in life he gives you the most thrilling adventures. As I say the man's just a wizard!"

It went on a good deal longer, Mr. Parker Pyne at intervals making modest disclaimers. He disliked the look that Mrs. Chester turned upon him. He disliked even more seeing her return along the beach in close confabulation with the garrulous singer of the praises.

The climax came quicker than he expected. That evening, after coffee, Mrs. Chester said abruptly,

"Will you come into the little salon, Mr. Pyne. There is something I want to say to you."

He could but bow and submit.

Mrs. Chester's self-control had been wearing thin—as the door of the little salon closed behind them, it snapped. She sat down and burst into tears.

"My boy, Mr. Parker Pyne. You must save him. We must save him. It's breaking my heart!"

"My dear lady, as a mere outsider—"

"Nina Wycherley says you can do anything. She said I was to have the utmost confidence in you. She advised me to tell you everything—and that you'd put the whole thing right."

Inwardly Mr. Parker Pyne cursed the obtrusive Mrs. Wycherley.

Resigning himself he said:

"Well, let us thrash the matter out. A girl, I suppose?"

"Did he tell you about her?"

"Only indirectly."

Words poured in a vehement stream from Mrs. Chester. The girl was dreadful. She drank, she swore—she wore no clothes to speak of. Her sister lived out here—was married to an artist—a Dutchman. The whole set was most undesirable. Half of them were living together without being married. Basil was completely changed. He had always been so quiet, so interested in serious subjects. He had thought at one time of taking up archaeology—"

"Well, well," said Mr. Parker Pyne. "Nature will have her revenge."

"What do you mean?"

"It isn't healthy for a young man to be interested in serious subjects. He ought to be making an idiot of himself over one girl after another."

"Please be serious, Mr. Pyne."

"I'm perfectly serious. Is the young lady, by any chance, the one who had tea with you yesterday?"

He had noticed her—her gray flannel trousers—the scarlet handkerchief tied loosely around her breast—the vermilion mouth and the fact that she had chosen a cocktail in preference to safer tea.

"You saw her? Terrible! Not the kind of girl Basil has ever admired."

"You haven't given him much chance to admire a girl, have you?"

"I?"

"He's been too fond of your company! Bad! However, I daresay he'll get over this—if you don't precipitate matters."

"You don't understand. He wants to marry this girl—Betty Gregg—they're engaged."

"It's gone as far as that?"

"Yes. Mr. Parker Pyne, you must do something. You must get the boy out of this disastrous marriage! His whole life will be ruined."

"Nobody's life can be ruined except by themselves."

"Basil's will be," said Mrs. Chester positively.

"I'm not worrying about Basil."

"You're not worrying about the girl?"

"No, I'm worrying about you. You've been squandering your birthright."

Mrs. Chester looked at him, slightly taken aback.

"What are the years from twenty to forty? Fettered and bound by personal and emotional relationships. That's bound to be. That's living. But later there's a new stage. You can think, observe life, discover something about other people and the truth about yourself. Life becomes real—significant. You see it as a whole. Not just one scene—the scene you, as an actor, are playing. No man or woman is actually himself (or herself) till after forty-five. That's when individuality has a chance."

"I've been wrapped up in Basil. He's been everything to me."

"Well, he shouldn't have been. That's what you're paying for now. Love him as much as you like, but you're Adela Chester, remember, a person—not just Basil's mother."

"But it will break my heart if Basil's life is ruined," said Basil's mother.

He looked at the delicate lines of her face, the wistful droop of her mouth. She was, somehow, a lovable woman. He did

not want her to be hurt. "I'll see what I can do."

He found Basil Chester only too ready to talk, eager to urge his point of view.

"This business is being just hellish. Mother's hopeless—prejudiced, narrow-minded. If only she'd let herself, she'd see how fine Betty is."

"And Betty?"

He sighed.

"Betty's being damned difficult! If she'd just conform a bit, I mean leave off the lipstick for a day—it might make all the difference. She seems to go out of her way to be—well — modern — when Mother's about."

Mr. Parker Pyne smiled.

"Betty and Mother are two of the dearest people in the world, I should have thought they would have taken to each other like hot cakes."

"You have a lot to learn, young man," said Mr. Parker Pyne.

"I wish you'd come along and see Betty and have a good talk about it all."

Mr. Parker Pyne accepted the invitation readily.

Betty and her sister and her husband lived in a small dilapidated villa a little way back from the sea. Their life was of a refreshing simplicity. Their furniture comprised three chairs, a table and beds. There was a cupboard in the wall that held the bare requirements of cups and plates. Hans was an excitable young man with wild blond hair that stood up all over his head. He spoke very odd English with incredible rapidity, walking up and down as he did so. Stella, his wife, was small and fair. Betty Gregg had red hair and freckles and a mischievous eye. She was, he noticed, not nearly so made up as she had been the previous day at the Pino d'Oro.

She gave him a cocktail and said with a twinkle:

"You're in on the big bust-up?"

Mr. Parker Pyne nodded.

"And whose side are you on? The young lovers—or the disapproving mother?"

"May I ask you a question?"

"Certainly."

"Have you been very tactful over all this?"

"Not at all," said Miss Gregg frankly. "But the old cat put my back up" (she glanced round to make sure that Basil was out of earshot). "That woman just makes me feel mad. She'd kept Basil tied to her apron strings all these years—that sort of thing makes a man look like a fool. Basil isn't a fool really. Then she's so terribly pukka sahib."

"That's not really such a bad thing. It's merely unfashionable just at present."

Betty Gregg gave a sudden twinkle.

"You mean it's like putting Chippendale chairs in the attic in Victorian days? Later you get them down again and say, aren't they marvelous?"

"Something of the kind."

Betty Gregg considered.

"Perhaps you're right. I'll be honest. It was Basil who put my back up—being so anxious about what impression I'd make on his mother. It drove me to extremes. Even now I believe he might give me up—if his mother worked on him good and hard."

"He might," said Mr. Parker Pyne. "If she went about it the right way."

"Are you going to tell her the right way? She won't think of it herself, you know. She'll just go on disapproving and that won't do the trick. But if you prompted her—"

She bit her lip, raised frank blue eyes to his.

"I've heard about you, Mr. Parker Pyne. You're supposed to know something about human nature. Do you think Basil and I could make a go of it—or not?"

"I should like an answer to three questions."

"Suitability test? All right, go ahead."

"Do you sleep with your window open or shut?"

"Open. I like lots of air."

"Do you and Basil enjoy the same kind of food?"

"Yes."

"Do you like going to bed early or late?"

"Really, under the rose, early. At half-past ten I yawn, and I secretly feel rather hearty in the mornings, but of course I daren't admit it."

"You ought to suit each other very well," said Mr. Parker Pyne.

"Rather a superficial test."

"Not at all. I have known seven marriages at least, entirely wrecked, because the husband liked sitting up till midnight and the wife fell asleep at half-past nine and vice versa."

"It's a pity," said Betty, "that everybody can't be happy. Basil and I, and his mother giving us her blessing."

Mr. Parker Pyne coughed.

"I think," he said, "that that could possibly be managed."

She looked at him doubtfully.

"Now I wonder," she said, "if you're double crossing me?"

Mr. Parker Pyne's face told nothing.

To Mrs. Chester he was soothing, but vague. An engagement was not marriage. He himself was going to Soller for a week. He suggested that her line of action should be non-committal. Let her appear to acquiesce.

He spent a very enjoyable week at Soller.

On his return he found that a totally unexpected development had arisen.

As he entered the Pino d'Oro the first thing he saw was Mrs. Chester and Betty Gregg having tea together. Basil was not there. Mrs. Chester looked haggard. Betty, too, was looking off color. She was hardly made up at all, and her eyelids looked as though she had been crying.

They greeted him in a friendly fashion, but neither of them mentioned Basil.

Suddenly he heard the girl beside him draw in her breath sharply as though something had hurt her. Mr. Parker Pyne turned his head.

Basil Chester was coming up the steps from the sea front. With him was a girl so exotically beautiful that it quite took your breath away. She was dark and her figure was marvelous. No one could fail to notice the fact since she wore nothing but a single garment of pale blue crepe. She was heavily made up with ocher powder and an orange scarlet mouth—but the unguents only displayed her remarkable beauty in a more pronounced fashion. As for young Basil, he seemed unable to take his eyes from her face.

"You're very late, Basil," said his mother. "You were to have taken Betty to Mac's."

"My fault," drawled the beautiful unknown. "We just drifted." She turned to Basil. "Angel—get me something with a kick in it!"

She tossed off her shoe and stretched out her manicured fingernails.

She paid no attention to the two women, but she leaned a little towards Mr. Parker Pyne.

"Terrible island this," she said. "I was just dying with boredom before I met Basil. He is rather a pet!"

"Mr. Parker Pyne—Miss Ramona," said Mrs. Chester.

The girl acknowledged the introduction with a lazy smile.

"I guess I'll call you Parker almost at once," she murmured. "My name's Dolores."

Basil returned with the drinks. Miss Ramona divided her conversation (what there was of it—it was mostly glances) between Basil and Mr. Parker Pyne. Of the two women she took no notice whatever. Betty attempted once or twice to join in the conversation but the other girl merely stared at her and yawned.

Suddenly Dolores rose.

"Guess I'll be going along now. I'm at the other hotel. Anyone coming to see me home?"

Basil sprang up.

"I'll come with you."

Mrs. Chester said: "Basil, my dear—"

"I'll be back presently, Mother."

"Isn't he the mother's boy?"

Miss Ramona asked of the world at large. "Just toots round after her, don't you?"

Basil flushed and looked awkward. Miss Ramona gave a nod in Mrs. Chester's direction, a dazzling smile to Mr. Parker Pyne and she and Basil moved off together.

After they had gone there was rather an awkward silence. Mr. Parker Pyne did not like to speak first. Betty Gregg was twisting her fingers and looking out to sea. Mrs. Chester looked flushed and angry.

Betty said: "Well, what do you think of our new acquisition in Pollensa Bay?" Her voice was not quite steady.

Mr. Parker Pyne said cautiously:

"A little—er—exotic."

"Exotic?" Betty gave a short bitter laugh.

Mrs. Chester said: "She's terrible—terrible. Basil must be quite mad."

Betty said sharply: "Basil's all right."

"Her toenails," said Mrs. Chester with a shiver of nausea.

Betty rose suddenly.

"I think, Mrs. Chester, I'll go home and not stay to dinner after all."

"Oh, my dear. Basil will be so disappointed."

"Will he?" asked Betty with a short laugh. "Anyway, I think I will. I've got rather a headache."

She smiled at them both and went off. Mrs. Chester turned to Mr. Parker Pyne.

"I wish we had never come to this place—never!"

Mr. Parker Pyne shook his head sadly.

"You shouldn't have gone away," said Mrs. Chester. "If you'd been here this wouldn't have happened."

Mr. Parker Pyne was stung to respond:

"My dear lady, I can assure you that when it comes to a question of a beautiful young woman, I should have no influence over your son whatever. He—er—seems to be of a very susceptible nature.

"He never used to be," said Mrs. Chester tearfully.

"Well," said Mr. Parker Pyne with an attempt at cheerfulness, "this new attraction seems to have broken the back of his infatuation for Miss Gregg. That must be some satisfaction to you."

"I don't know what you mean," said Mrs. Chester. "Betty is a dear child and devoted to Basil. She is behaving extremely well over this. I think my boy must be mad."

Mr. Parker Pyne received this startling change of face without wincing. He had met inconsistency in women before. He said mildly:

"Not exactly mad—just bewitched."

Mrs. Chester snorted.

Basil ran up the steps from the sea front.

"Hullo, Mater, here I am. Where's Betty?"

"Betty's gone home with a headache. I don't wonder."

"Sulking, you mean."

"I consider, Basil, that you are being extremely unkind to Betty."

"For God's sake, Mother, don't jaw. If Betty is going to make this fuss every time I speak to another girl a nice sort of life we'll lead together."

"You are engaged."

"Oh, we're engaged all right. That doesn't mean that we're not going to have any friends of our own. Nowadays people have to lead their own lives and try to cut out jealousy."

He paused.

"Look here, if Betty isn't going to dine with us—I think I'll go back to the Mariposa. They did ask me to dine . . ."

"Oh, Basil—"

The boy gave her an exasperated look, then ran off down the steps.

Mrs. Chester looked eloquently at Mr. Parker Pyne.

"You see," she said.

He saw.

Matters came to a head a couple of days later. Betty and Basil were to have gone for a long walk, taking a picnic lunch with them. Betty arrived at the Pino d'Oro to find that Basil had forgotten the plan and gone over to Formentor for the day with Dolores Ramona's party.

Beyond a tightening of the lips the girl made no sign. Presently, however, she got up and stood in front of Mrs. Chester (the two women were alone on the terrace).

"It's quite all right," she said. "It doesn't matter. But I think—all the same—that we'd better call the whole thing off."

She slipped from her finger the signet ring that Basil had given her—he would buy the real engagement ring later.

"Will you give him back this, Mrs. Chester? And tell him it's all right—not to worry. . . ."

"Betty dear, don't! He does love you—really."

"It looks like it, doesn't it?" said the girl with a short laugh. "No—I've got some pride. Tell him that I—I wish him luck."

When Basil returned at sunset he was greeted by a storm.

He flushed a little at the sight of his ring.

"So that's how she feels, is it? Well, I daresay it's the best thing."

"Basil!"

"Well, frankly, Mother, we don't seem to have been hitting it off lately."

"Whose fault was that?"

"I don't see that it was mine particularly. Jealousy's beastly and I really don't see why you

should get all worked up about it. You begged me yourself not to marry Betty."

"That was before I knew her. Basil—my dear—you're not thinking of marrying this other creature."

Basil Chester said soberly:

"I'd marry her like a shot if she'd have me—but I'm afraid she won't."

Cold chills went down Mrs. Chester's spine. She sought and found Mr. Parker Pyne, placidly reading a book in a sheltered corner.

"You must do something! You must do something! My boy's life will be ruined."

Mr. Parker Pyne was getting a little tired of Basil Chester's life being ruined.

"What can I do?"

"Go and see this terrible creature. If necessary buy her off."

"That may come very expensive."

"I don't care."

"I'll make no promises. . . ,

"But please go. . . ."

Mr. Parker Pyne returned from the Mariposa at midnight. Mrs. Chester was sitting up for him.

"Well?" she demanded breathlessly.

His eyes twinkled.

"The Senorita Dolores Ramona will leave Pollensa tomorrow morning and the island tomorrow night."

"Oh, Mr. Parker Pyne! How did you manage it?"

"It won't cost a cent," said Mr. Parker Pyne. Again his eyes twinkled. "I rather fancied I might have a hold over her—and I was right."

"You are wonderful. Nina Wycherley was quite right. You must let me know—er—your fees—"

Mr. Parker Pyne held up a well-manicured hand.

"Not a penny. It has been a pleasure. I hope all will go well. Of course the boy will be very upset at first when he finds she's disappeared and left no address. Just go easy with him for a week or two."

"If only Betty will forgive him—"

"She'll forgive him all right. They're a nice couple. By the way, I'm leaving tomorrow, too."

"Oh, Mr. Parker Pyne, we shall miss you."

"Perhaps it's just as well I should go before that boy of yours gets infatuated with yet a third girl."

Mr. Parker Pyne leaned over the rail of the steamer and looked at the lights of Palma. Beside him stood Dolores Ramona. He was saying appreciatively:

"A very nice piece of work, Madeleine. I'm glad I wired you to come out. It's odd when you're such a quiet stay-at-home girl really."

Madeleine de Sara, alias Dolores Ramona, alias Maggie Sayers, said primly: "I'm glad you're pleased, Mr. Parker Pyne. It's been a nice little change. I think I'll go below now and get to bed before the boat starts. I'm such a bad sailor."

A few minutes later a hand fell on Mr. Parker Pyne's shoulder. He turned to see Basil Chester.

"Had to come and see you off, Mr. Parker Pyne, and give you Betty's love and her and my best thanks. It was a grand stunt of yours. Betty and Mother are as thick as thieves. Seemed a shame to deceive the old darling—but she was being difficult. Anyway it's all right now. I must just be careful to keep up the annoyance stuff a couple of days longer. We're no end grateful to you, Betty and I."

"I wish you every happiness," said Mr. Parker Pyne.

"Thanks."

There was a pause, then Basil said with somewhat overdone carelessness:

"Is Miss—Miss de Sara anywhere about? I'd like to thank her, too."

Mr. Parker Pyne shot a keen glance at him.

He said:

"I'm afraid Miss de Sara's gone to bed."

"Oh, too bad—well, perhaps I'll see her in London sometime."

"As a matter of fact she is going to America on business for me almost at once."

"Oh!" Basil's tone was blank. "Well," he said. "I'll be getting along. . . .

Mr. Parker Pyne smiled. On his way to his cabin he tapped on the door of Madeleine's.

"How are you, my dear? All right? Our young friend has been along. The usual slight attack of Madeleinitis. He'll get over it in a day or two, but you are rather distracting."

---

IN NEXT MONTH'S *SAINT*—

a murderer uses a strange Japanese cult for his own sinister purposes in Allan Beekman's *Dog Spirit;* a man escapes, for a little while, into a quieter world, in Will Oursler's *Prelude;* and strange things happen in Poul Anderson's *Corpse in Armour.*

**— AVAILABLE AT YOUR FAVORITE NEWSSTAND**

# front-page cop

*by . . . Leslie T. White*

**Officer Sheedy was sure that his father-in-law didn't approve of him. But a cop can be mistaken—and so can his deadliest enemies.**

MATT SHEEDY was old Iron Mike Dougal's son-in-law, for all the good the relationship did him. Captain Dougal skippered the headquarters' homicide detail, a man-killing job, and that's no pun. Matt was just an ordinary patrolman pounding the beat down at Harbor precinct, and their paths never crossed.

Matt and Alice—Sweet Alice, he called her—had a two-room flat over Steinbloch's Delicatessen. In their thirteen months of marriage, Iron Mike had visited them twice, on Christmas and Thanksgiving.

There had been no hard feelings. It was just the Old Man's way. As one of the detectives said, aptly enough, Iron Mike only called on two kinds of people—murdered and murderer. Matt Sheedy didn't care, and Alice was so much in love with her husband, she didn't mind either.

Alice had hungered a lot for visible affection since her mother

---

*When Leslie White isn't writing about 16th-century pirates and princes who have a certain manner with ladies* (MAGNUS THE MAGNIFICENT—*Crown Publishers*) *or a crusader in 11th-century France* (WINGED SWORD) *you're likely to find him peering through a microscope beside a lad in blue serge, or making a cop's troubles his own in a hard-hitting crime thriller. Not many best selling historical novelists are as versatile as Mr. White, but if their numbers were legion we're quite sure we'd give* FRONT PAGE COP *a very special rating.*

---



Originally published as "Oomph Cop."
Copyright, 1940, by Popular Publications, Inc.

had died ten years before, and while Iron Mike would have willingly given his life for Alice, to save his life he couldn't unbend enough to demonstrate his love. But Matt was Irish, and love-making was as natural as breathing to him.

So that's how it stood until that sticky August night when Matt walked into the Dock saloon and killed Jake Lugi and Pinky Bock. That gave him his first taste of publicity, and shortly thereafter he felt the pangs of ambition.

There was nothing about Matt Sheedy to distinguish him from any of the other four thousand odd cops on the department. He was just a tall, raw-boned, red-headed fellow such as you see tramping a beat in any big city. His features were on the large side, but a twisted smile saved his face.

Contrary to the newspaper buildup, Matt had not entered the saloon on the tip that Lugi and Bock—cop-killers, bank-robbers and Public Enemies one and two—were inside. He had sneaked in because he wanted a glass of cold beer. He hadn't seen the pair until Lugi, jittery from weeks in hiding, pulled his gun at the sight of brass buttons against a blue serge background.

Nor was Matt the "cool, fearless hero" described in the newspapers. He nearly died of fright when Lugi's first shot splintered the bar mirror and cleared the saloon, leaving him frozen against the mahogany, pitifully alone.

What Matt did then was largely automatic, although he deserved plenty of credit for accurate shooting. Any one of the five slugs he planted, two in Bock and three in Lugi, would have sufficed, and the neat, black-rimmed hole in Lugi's forehead was a particularly convincing touch.

He had never killed before, and the sight of his handiwork left him a little nauseated. But he found comfort in the terse compliments of the two hard-boiled radio-car patrolmen who were the first to arrive. Then one of them made a routine call to the Central office homicide squad.

So Iron Mike and his son-in-law finally crossed trails.

Not one of the crowd jammed in every door and window of the saloon saw Captain Dougal exhibit the slightest sign that he had ever so much as seen Matt Sheedy before. Iron Mike stalked into the place at the head of his squad, his head slightly bent and his big shoulders stooped. He went directly to the dead hoodlums and made a cursory examination. Then he left the details to his identification expert, and turned to one of the radio cops.

"Who knocked them over?"

The radio cop pointed.

"Young Sheedy. He had 'em on ice when we got here."

Matt was grinning slightly, his back resting against the bar. He was beginning to enjoy himself, and he figured the Old Man would be mighty proud of his son-in-law. But if Iron Mike was bursting with pride, he gave no evidence of the fact.

He did say, "You didn't waste any lead." But he said it the way you might comment on someone bursting pipes in a shooting gallery.

Matt felt a little foolish, but it didn't last long. At breakfast he told an adoring Alice, "Well, old Frozen-face got the surprise of his life when he walked in and saw me on the job." He chuckled. "But I must say your pop sticks to business."

"I'll bet he was proud of you, though," said Sweet Alice.

Matt crawled into bed, and when he woke up in the middle of the afternoon, he found himself momentarily famous. Lugi and Bock had been badly wanted by law enforcement agencies from the F.B.I. to village constables. And if Captain Dougal had been sparing with his praise, the newspapers were not. They portrayed Matt Sheedy as a cool, fearless hero who carried the memory of martyred comrades in his mind when he went alone into the waterfront dive to fight a death duel with the two gangsters.

Two days later the police commissioner horned in on the publicity by promoting the hero to the Central Office homicide detail where, as the commissioner blatantly phrased it, "Sheedy can use his excellent markmanship to rid this city of a few more murderers."

And then some reporter suddenly recalled that Matt Sheedy was Iron Mike's son-in-law. That smeared the story over the front page. Father-and-son stuff.

Matt got a great bang out of the stories, and he was pretty well pleased with himself and the world in general when he reported in plainclothes for work on the homicide squad.

He found Captain Dougal hunched behind a battered old oaken desk. The skipper waved him into a chair, and dourly contemplated his own gnarled hands. And anxious as he was for the Old Man to break the strained silence, Matt was conscious of the character of this shabby little office.

In a lot of ways it was like Iron Mike himself. Severe, stripped of all superfluities and scarred by rough usage, it seemed permeated with all the dramas enacted within those four bare walls. A small barred window looked down on a patrol alley where three squad cars were bunched for emergencies. Elsewhere in the building a metal door clanged; from somewhere

the muffled sobs of a woman filtered through. Slowly Matt's jauntiness seeped away.

"Sheedy, this is the trickiest, toughest detail on the department," the skipper said finally. "It's the best, because I usually pick my own men. Seasoned, experienced men. You were handed to me I don't like it."

Matt was taken aback. "I didn't know you felt like that," he said. "What have you got against me?"

A siren wailed as a squad car rolled out of the alley below. The skipper's chair creaked wearily as he leaned back before answering. The faint odor of a gun-cleaner passed in through the window.

"You've pounded a beat slightly less than a year and a half," the veteran growled. "That's just about long enough to teach you the difference between a club and a gun. Then you stumbled onto a couple of trapped rats and killed them. That was a good piece of routine duty. But is there anything in that record that entitles you to think you're a detective?"

That's a swell way for a father-in-law to act, Sheedy thought, and he felt his face grow red. "I got a right to a fair trial, like anybody else on the force," he said.

"You'll get your trial. But you'll have to hold up your end. My boys can't carry you. Report out to the squad room."

Matt went out to the squad room, a dingy place with a dozen small desks and stiff, uncomfortable chairs to match. Of the half-dozen men in the room, he recognized four; Sergeant Martel, who had lost a hand in a knife fight with a marihuana smoker, was playing rummy with Leverock and Stuart, the pair who had cleaned up the Dolly Graves murder. Hopkins, another veteran, was asleep tilted back in a chair against the wall.

Two other detectives were questioning a woman. The card players glanced up and nodded when Matt came in. He found a chair near the window and picked up a newspaper.

After an hour of this, Matt began to chafe with resentment. He assured himself these other men were jealous and he thought he knew why. It had taken most of them from ten to fifteen years to make this squad that he had made in almost as many months. Well, all Matt wanted was a chance.

He got it right after lunch. The skipper told him to locate a witness named Jason V. Hepple, and gave Matt the man's last known address.

This wasn't "using his excellent marksmanship to rid the city of a few more murderers," but Matt was pleased to be doing something. So he hopped out to

the address which Iron Mike had given him, and questioned the new tenants. He talked to the neighbors; he tried to locate friends of the missing witness. He questioned the mailman and even tried the telephone book. After two days, he walked into Captain Dougal's office and announced that Jason V. Hepple was not in the city.

Without comment, the Old Man picked up the telephone and called the Gas and Electric Company. He inquired if Hepple was still a subscriber. He was. It took Iron Mike less than three minutes to accomplish what Matt had failed to achieve in two days.

Matt got the idea that Iron Mike was riding him.

The jobs given him confirmed his suspicions. No menial task escaped him; every petty assignment was dropped on his desk.

He griped about it to Alice. "I guess the Old Man figures I'm not good enough to be his son-in-law," he grumbled. "Or maybe he doesn't want to split up the glory among the family."

Naturally Alice was hurt by this change in Matt, and aggressively defended her father. "But, darling, Dad isn't like that. You ask any of the men who work with him. Why he's absolutely fair—almost too fair. And after all, Matt dear, you haven't had much experience."

When Alice pulled that one, Matt slammed out of the flat. Since the beginning of his success had been in a saloon, he hunted up another convivial spot near headquarters, which was frequented by criminal lawyers and newspapermen.

There he found compatibility and the sympathy for which he yearned. There he met a girl called Chips—a good-looking brunette in her twenties, a reporter on one of the more sensational dailies. She was particularly appreciative of Matt's Irish wit, and found him an excellent pipeline into the confidential activities of the homicide detail.

About the latter, Martel warned him. "Watch those newspaper dames," he suggested. "They'd cross up their own mother for a headline."

"I'm used to being crossed up," Matt said, and walked away.

With increasing frequency, he took out his resentment on Alice. She, in turn, was bewildered by the change in her husband, and was mutely terrified that he was drifting away from her. Matt became convinced that she had aligned herself on the side of Iron Mike, so he felt justified in spending more of his off-time away from home—most of it with Chips.

He wasn't in love with Chips, nor she with him. But she gave him something he didn't get at home—admiration. And she cannily kept alive Matt's convic-

tion that Iron Mike was trying to break him out of jealousy. Whether over the job, or over Sweet Alice, they couldn't decide.

During his working hours, however, Matt had flashes of logic that made him wonder. All the other detectives, not alone those on the homicide detail, and even the criminal lawyers, respected Captain Dougal, even if they couldn't like him personally. He was the sort of police officer other men liked to work with, for he asked no man to do something he himself would not do, or could not do. Matt began to feel a grudging admiration for the Old Man. He worked hard, if only to prove that Iron Mike's measurement of him was wrong.

He might have made it if he had not gone to the Troubador that Saturday night with Chips.

The Troubador was a third-rate night spot with a fast-moving floor show. Matt wasn't having a particularly good time. He was a little disgusted with Chips, and wished that he was back in the flat with Sweet Alice. So he was in a surly mood when the three stickup men walked in and held up the joint.

Matt sat glumly at his table, watching the three punks brandish their guns. It wasn't like the night he shot it out with Lugi and Bock. He wasn't trapped this time. He was just contemptuous and a little drunk. He suddenly pulled the table over for a shield, drew his gun, and lying on the floor with his elbow propped up, he killed two of the gunmen and brought down the third near the door.

This time he put in his own call to headquarters. "This is Sheedy," he told Iron Mike over the phone. "I just picked off a couple of stickup men. What do you want done?"

With Chips an eye-witness, the papers gave Matt a great write-up.

He was a hero again.

Sweet Alice was a little weary of having a hero around the house, so she left him. She had a long talk, her first real talk with her father.

"Matt thinks you're riding him, Dad. He's obsessed with the idea. What is wrong? We were so happy before!"

It took Mike Dougal a long time to get words coming.

"Matt's a fine lad, baby, a fine lad. But making a good cop is something like making a fine building. You got to lay the foundation before you can build the upper stories. Matt would have built a regular skyscraper, if he hadn't tried to start with the roof first."

"I know, Dad, but Matt can't see that. Why don't you talk to him?"

Iron Mike squirmed. "A man's got to find those things out for himself, baby. If I tell

him, he won't believe me because he can't see it yet." He picked up the morning paper with Matt's picture squarely on the front page. "An' those stories don't help him to see."

Captain Dougal had not meant to speak to Matt about his personal business, but when Alice left his office, he suffered the acute agony of a man who has no release for his emotions. So after an hour or two of brooding, he sent for Matt Sheedy, and closed the door.

"You figure I'm riding you, Sheedy?" he asked bluntly.

Matt nodded. "Sure I do. You treat me like an office boy. Yet when something comes up, like last night, I prove I can deliver."

Iron Mike made a pyramid with his fingers. "You have confused guts with courage. Nobody doubts your guts with a gun, kid. But it takes courage to plug along, getting experience, testing your judgment, learning your job in the right way."

Matt got up. "I get what you are driving at," he said. "You got the old-fashioned idea that a guy has to tramp a beat for fifteen years before he's good enough for this crew. Well, I won my right to this squad, and you can't squeeze me out of it."

And he walked out.

Iron Mike had dinner with Alice that night.

"I talked to Matt," he reported.

Her eyes lighted. "And . . . ?"

He shrugged. "He's got the bit in his teeth. We'll have to let him run with it . . ."

Matt didn't get over his second lucky break. He wearied of the routine and leg work of the detail. He wanted movement and action. Occasionally the skipper assigned him to work with Sergeant Martel, or one of the other veterans, but always in a secondary capacity.

The men were friendly enough, but Matt sensed it was more tolerance than respect. He determined to show them if he ever got the chance.

He didn't go home to the flat at all any more. H lived uptown in a bachelor apartment and that's where he was sleeping the night Chips telephoned. She had to see him right away, she said, so he went over to her place. She was white with excitement and tension when she let him in.

"Matt, I got something hot—so hot it burns!" she blurted. "Matt, Roger Butler's eight-year-old kid has been kidnapped! Butler, the oil promoter!"

Matt whistled softly. "Does the skipper know about it?"

"Sure he knows. You wouldn't expect him to tell you about it, would you?"

"I guess not," Matt said.

Chips laughed. "Well, here's the setup. The F.B.I. got the kidnap story first, but Mike Dougal was called by someone

because a Butler servant was shot in the actual snatch. So the Feds and the police are working together for once."

"How'd you find out?" Matt asked. He knew how wary the F.B.I. was about giving out news, and Iron Mike was the same.

Chips smiled enigmatically. "I get around," she countered. "But here's where you come in. I know that the kidnappers have made their demand and old Butler has contacted the F.B.I. and the cops promise to make no move until the ransom's paid. Well, my paper has a tip on where the youngster's being held. You and I can crack this case together, Matt. I'll have it in headlines before any other sheet in town even knows there is a snatch, and you'll be famous!"

Matt rumpled his reddish hair and scowled. He knew that he should, technically, report to Captain Dougal. But if he did pass it over to Iron Mike, the skipper would probably relegate him to the background.

"You're not worrying about Mike?" Chips baited him. "We'll give him a break in the story by saying he put you on the case. He'll be darned glad to take the credit for that much after the way he's kicked you around."

Matt licked his lips. "You're sure of your information, Chips?"

"Look, fella, I'm doing you the favor," she snapped.

"Okay, okay," he said. "Let's get rolling."

The house was small and dark, and set well back from the shaded side street. Matt stood with Chips and a musty little news-photographer in a puddle of darkness, looking at it.

"Our informer tells us there's only one man in the house guarding the Butler kid," Chips explained. "After what you've been through, you certainly should be able to handle him."

Her voice had the ingratiating note some people use in spurring children to noble deeds. Matt caught it, and suddenly he did not wholly trust her. But he brushed the feeling aside. This was his one chance to force Iron Mike to recognize him as a resourceful officer in his own right. That objective blinded him to all reason. When he rescued the kidnapped youngster, he would tell all the reporters that Captain Dougal had personally assigned him to the job. Iron Mike would not dare deny it.

Matt unholstered his gun and slipped it into a convenient pocket of his coat. "You two stay here," he warned, and merged into the darkness. He circled the little house, approaching it from the rear.

The shades were tightly drawn, but, as Matt watched, he could see the pencil lines of light

that marked the windows. He felt the hair tingle along the back of his neck. The opaque darkness around him seemed to harbor men.

He put this down as the imaginings of fear, and walked swiftly across the yard to the rear door. The door was locked, but after listening a moment to satisfy himself there was no one standing just inside, he eased it open with a master key.

There is an indescribable sensation to stepping into the total darkness of a strange house, peopled with the unknown. As a patrolman, Matt had gone into buildings after criminals, but somehow this was different.

He pawed the gun out of his pocket. The cool, checkered butt steadied his confidence, and he felt his way slowly forward like a blind man.

Then he heard the soft whimper of the child.

Any doubts Matt Sheedy might have felt were swept away by that faint call of distress. He knew now that he was right; that regardless of the source of his information, regardless of his own selfish purpose in being here alone, he had at last located the kidnapped youngster.

He moved straight ahead, as though the presence of the child was in itself an armor that made him impregnable. He was halfway down a hallway, when a door opened suddenly and a wide rectangle of light splashed full on him. Framed in the doorway was a man.

Matt was the first to recover from the surprise, so he was moving obliquely when the other man swung up his gun. He felt the impact, rather than pain, as his right leg jerked out from under him and threw him against the wall. He leaned there, propped up by his left shoulder, and fired twice. He waited until the man pitched forward. Then he hobbled to the stairway at the end of the hall.

Up above he heard voices; and footsteps drummed along the floors. But over all that noise, he heard the child cry again, and he guided his course that way with a stubborn singleness of purpose that he had not been aware he possessed.

When he tried to climb erect, he found that his leg was numbed, so he crawled up on all fours like a dog. There were two men at the head of the stairs, and when he was less than halfway up, Matt realized he couldn't go much farther into their gunfire. He stopped and lay flat.

With a coolness that amazed him he calculated his shots. He had three left. He spent one now, and a man tumbled down the stairs and rolled past him. The other man ran back along the hallway and ducked into a room.

Matt inched up the rest of the

distance and hauled himself erect on the balustrade. Loss of blood gave him an exalted giddiness, and he reeled across the corridor towards a closed door. As he grabbed the knob, a harsh voice screamed: "Don't open that door, or I'll—"

The end of the threat was lost in noise on the floor below. Matt heard men running, then the quick stutter of gunfire.

He sat down on the floor facing the door, and with his good leg kicked it open. There was a big guy standing across the room, with a black automatic. Matt saw every detail. The big man was holding a curly-headed girl in one arm, like a shield. But the mobster was expecting the erect figure of a man to walk through that door, and it took him an instant to re-focus his attention to Matt, sitting there in the opening.

Matt shot his legs from under him, and as the gunman crashed to the floor, Matt scrambled into the room and hauled the screaming child to the safety of his own arms.

He heard feet pounding up the stairs. It was too late now to close the door, so he pushed the child behind his own huge body and turned his face to the doorway, as a big cop charged into the room.

He was too far gone to recognize anyone in that smoky half-light. But when the newcomer shouted, "Sheedy!" Matt draped his gun arm around the child's shoulder.

"It's Iron Mike, honey!" he whispered, as if he wanted the youngster to know that everything was all right. Then he fell on his face, dragging the child down with him.

That was the picture the papers carried—Matt Sheedy, wounded and bloodied, shielding the terrified Butler child with his own massive body. Matt Sheedy, hero! The musty little cameraman had been right behind Iron Mike when the cops raided the house. What his camera couldn't tell, Chips and the other reporters filled in. The story made history.

Ten days later Matt opened his eyes in the hospital room and discovered he was famous. Now that he was permitted visitors, it seemed that everybody in the city was there to congratulate him and tell him what a swell cop he was.

To top it all, the police commissioner himself breezed in, accompanied by a couple of photographers. The commissioner acted mighty pleased, and he told Matt to hurry up and get on his feet because there would be a nice berth waiting for him at headquarters—a pretty big berth, too.

That made Matt a trifle uneasy. Too much conflict with Iron Mike might be painful. So

he asked casually about Iron Mike. The commissioner laughed shortly.

"Don't worry about him," he said. "We've got him where he won't pull any more fancy plays." He rose and started for the door. "Hurry up and get well, Sheedy. We need you on the job."

It took Matt nearly two days to get the real story of what had happened the night he was shot, and after. He learned that Iron Mike Dougal and two of his crew had been keeping the kidnap house under surveillance for several days, at the request of the F.B.I.

It had not been known definitely that the missing child was held there and the Federal officers had specifically instructed the police to make no overt move, as they had guaranteed both the distraught parents and the kidnappers that no action would be taken until the child had been safely returned to her home. What even Iron Mike had not known was that the F.B.I. had a special agent working undercover as a member of the mob.

Iron Mike had recognized Sheedy blundering into the little white house, but not soon enough to stop him. So when the shooting started, there had been only one thing left to do. Iron Mike had led his boys on the raid. In getting into the hideaway, the police had seriously wounded the government undercover agent.

When the story broke in all the papers that Sheedy had been acting under the personal orders of Captain Dougal, the government brought pressure to bear in the right places. Iron Mike was charged with doublecrossing the Federal officers and held responsible for the wounding of their agent. Even Roger Butler joined in accusing the police of grandstanding and needlessly endangering the life of his child.

For the press it was a great opportunity. In full cry, the papers rode the police department hard.

To all this, Iron Mike kept silent. So they broke him, quietly and thoroughly and he went back into harness to pound a dreary suburban beat as a common patrolman. He took it the way he took everything else—in his stride.

Matt heard that Sweet Alice took her father a warm lunch at three o'clock every morning just as she'd done for him when he used to work the graveyard shift out where there were no restaurants. Iron Mike was broken, all right.

When Matt finally got the truth pieced together, bitterness washed over him, and shame. Matt Sheedy, the hero. Matt Sheedy, the grandstander. Matt Sheedy, the fake. His arrogance left him. He was humble, and afraid for what he had done to Iron Mike.

There was just one course left for a man like Matt.

The Commissioner was astounded to see Sheedy come marching into his office, and more astounded when he had heard him out.

For Sheedy told his story, not sparing himself in any details.

"Well, this certainly sheds a new light on the Butler case, Sheedy," he said finally, "and I'll reinstate Captain Dougal at once. But I can't understand why he didn't come right out and frankly explain about your blundering into the hideout without his knowledge."

"I'm beginning to understand things like that, sir," Matt said. "Captain Dougal backs up his men, right or wrong."

The official looked shrewdly at Matt. "I suppose you know, Sheedy, that despite your personal valor in this affair, you will have to be disciplined?"

Matt reddened. "Yes, sir. If you don't mind, sir, I'd like to serve on the same beat the skipper has now, until I know enough to get on the homicide squad again. And I'd like to go over tonight and break the news to him myself."

The commissioner shrugged. "I could give you a better post than that," he said. "But it's okay if you want it that way. Tell Dougal the good news yourself, and report for duty tomorrow night."

Matt dug out his old blue uniform and took it down to the tailor near headquarters to be pressed. Then, about quarter of three, he took his station on a quiet suburban street corner.

Suddenly he heard the sharp click of high heels on the pavement, and his heart began to pound. He couldn't move. He just stood there under the street light and waited for her.

She gave a little gasp. "Matt! What are you doing here!"

He looked at her for a moment, drinking in the wonder of her, the wonder that he'd lost.

All at once she was in his arms, pressed hard against him. The lunchbox lay forgotten on the ground, and he was saying broken words that didn't make sense. But somehow Alice understood.

"Oh, my darling. It's been so long, so terribly long."

"Alice," he said, "I've been such a fool. Stupid and blind. But tonight I'm starting again—if you'll let me. I'm going to take over Iron Mike's beat, and he's going back to his old job. Maybe, some day, I'll know enough to work for him again. And maybe, someday, I can make you love me again."

And that's the way Iron Mike found them when he came around to ring in: A cop and his girl, sitting side by side on the curbstone, with not even the lunchbox between them.

# the plaster cat

*by . . . Q. Patrick*

**This was an unorthodox death. Was it murder — or — ?**

LT. TIMOTHY TRANT of the New York Homicide Division stopped his car at the corner of Park and Eightieth Street. He was to pick up Doc Sanders there. It was seven o'clock in the morning and Trant knew that Sanders, who was sour at best, would be at his sourest.

"Fine thing!" The little police doctor threw his bag in the car and jumped in beside Trant. "Why can't your murderers keep respectable hours?"

"It isn't murder." Trant smiled as he started his car. "It's an accident—or so they tell me—at the Ruskin School for Girls."

"Accident!" Doc Sanders snorted into his handkerchief. "We're the Homicide Squad not an insurance company. Hope you told them that."

"My dear doc, you don't tell things to the Ruskin School." Trant headed the car uptown. "It happens to be the most exclusive, the most—"

"Snobbish," put in Sanders

*Madeline Winters, daughter of Ambassador Winters, "the man who's over there holding Europe together for us" was dead. A student at the exclusive Ruskin School, she'd been found by Miss Ruskin who'd immediately called in the distinguished Dr. Graves—then the police. Why? Timothy Trant, "the smoothie of Homicide," expert in "high-life slayings," is assigned to the case.*


Copyright, © 1946, by Mystery Club, Inc.

irritably. "Getting me out of bed at this hour for an accident."

"It's an accident with a very plush victim, if that makes you feel any better. Madeline Winters, daughter of Ambassador Winters, the man who's over there holding Europe together for us."

"Kenneth Winters' daughter." Sanders was impressed now. "Why this is headline stuff."

"It isn't," replied Trant. "No headlines. No publicity." He grinned. "And remember, accidents happen in the best of families."

"But she's dead?" asked Sanders.

"Yes. Apparently, there was a dance—graduation dance, I guess—at the school last night. Madeline Winters lives there at the school. She was missing after the dance. They found her early this morning. Miss Ruskin called in Dr. Harlan Graves."

"Dr. Graves." Sanders was even more impressed. "Graves is the biggest name in neurology in the country. Say, we're certainly moving in high circles." He threw Trant a faintly malicious glance. "That's why they called you in, I suppose. Timothy Trant, Homicide's boy wonder, the smoothie of the Homicide Squad and specialist in high-life slayings."

Timothy grinned. Ever since he'd joined the force, he'd had to live down the fact that he'd graduated from Croton and Princeton.

"Well, here we are," he said as he drove the car through imposing iron gates.

The Ruskin School for Girls was an impressive building, situated in spacious grounds on the elegant fringes of New York. The campus was formal and sleek as a debutante in a receiving line.

Timothy Trant was fascinated by contrasts. He had abandoned a career in law to enlist in the police force simply because crime offered so many intriguing paradoxes. Although he knew so little about Madeline Winters' death, he was already sensing a paradox here. The daughter of a very famous man had died in a place which should have been as insulated against the perils of the world as a nunnery. It was unorthodox.

On the lawn, close to the main buildings, a large canvas marquee had been erected. Presumably, the dance had taken place out of doors. As they passed it, Trant glanced at it curiously. There is always something bleak about a marquee on the morning after a dance. But to Trant, who deliberately cultivated his imagination, there seemed something faintly sinister about this one.

A trim maid answered their ring.

"Yes, sir, Miss Ruskin is expecting you."

She led Trant and Dr. Sanders through a wide hall into a broad, sunny office. A woman rose from behind a desk to greet them.

"I'm glad you have come, gentlemen." She held out a steady hand to Timothy. "You're Lieutenant Trant, aren't you? Dr. Graves asked particularly for you when we decided to call the police. He's waiting upstairs with —Madeline."

Timothy studied Miss Constance Ruskin as he and Sanders accompanied her upstairs. She had an arresting face, too strong perhaps for beauty, but charming and serene. It was the face of a woman who knew what she wanted in life and got it, but who also knew the price of getting what some called success.

As if to contradict any notion that spinster headmistresses of girls' schools were dowdy, she was dressed in perfect taste and the snow-white hair about her essentially young face was exquisitely set.

"Madeline is in her room."

Miss Ruskin led them into a completely feminine bedroom, decorated in frivolous shades of pink. A tall, middle-aged man with stooped shoulders stood at the window with his back to them. Miss Ruskin introduced him as Doctor Harlan Graves and withdrew.

The celebrated neurologist nodded in reply to Doc Sanders' greeting and turned dark, disillusioned eyes on Timothy.

"Your father is an old friend of mine, Trant. A fine physician." He paused, adding rather jerkily: "It was I who asked Miss Ruskin to call you. Miss Ruskin is satisfied that Madeline's death was accidental and I hasten to add that I am in complete agreement with her. I am perfectly prepared to sign the death certificate but—" he coughed and it was a rather pompous cough which did not seem to fit his personality—"but I realize it is orthodox to summon the police in cases like this."

Dr. Graves turned to the pink canopied bed which stood in the corner. Timothy and Doc Sanders moved after him across the room and Timothy saw Madeline Winters for the first time.

Unlike his colleagues, Timothy had never become immunized to the sight of death, particularly when the victim was a beautiful girl. And Madeline Winters, lying on the bed in a white satin evening dress with her auburn hair gleaming against the pillows, was very beautiful.

Dr. Graves was saying: "Miss Ruskin found her and I prefer to have Miss Ruskin tell you the story herself. Suffice it to say she was found in the garage with the engine of a car running. Her death was almost certainly caused by carbon monoxide poisoning."

"In a garage with a car running?" echoed Doc Sanders. He gave a matter-of-fact grunt. "Suicide, maybe, yeah?"

Dr. Graves' face flushed its disapproval of this suggestion. He opened his mouth, obviously to refute it, but before he did so, Trant broke in. He had been gazing down at the girl's hair.

"Hardly suicide, Sanders, with that blow on the head. Must have been struck pretty hard." He indicated a marked contusion above the girl's left ear to Sanders and turned his deceptively quiet gaze on Dr. Graves. "A blow like that would probably have knocked her unconscious, wouldn't it?"

"Almost c e r t a i n l y." Dr. Graves returned Timothy's gaze unwaveringly. "That is why both Miss Ruskin and I are convinced that the death was accidental. Madeline had gone to the garage to get the car. Probably she tripped on the skirt of her evening gown and struck her head against something with sufficient violence to render her unconscious. The engine was running. Before she came to . . ." He gestured with his sensitive hands. "That is how Miss Ruskin and I explain the accident."

Lieutenant Trant said nothing. It was possible, yes, that the girl had turned on the car engine, tripped, struck her head and rendered herself unconscious. But to Timothy, trained to suspect the worst, it was equally possible that someone else had followed Madeline into the garage, struck her on the head and then turned on the car engine.

Yet Timothy did not believe in voicing his thoughts, particularly when they involved murder. Dr. Graves was obviously doing his utmost to sell them on the accident theory. It might pay to let him think, for a while, that he was getting away with it.

As the three men gazed down at the body, Timothy noticed something else that sent a tingle of interest up his spine.

Three distinct scratches shone red against the white skin of the girl's left arm.

## II

TRANT PRAYED inwardly that Doc Sanders would not notice them and make some blundering comment. But, since he believed in prayer only up to a point, he drew Sanders away and managed to embroil the two physicians in a lengthy discussion of death by asphyxiation.

While the doctors were talking, Trant roamed around the room. At first it revealed nothing. Then he noticed a small object lying close to the bed, half hidden under the pink froth of the canopy drapes.

He picked it up and examined it. It was an irregular fragment of plaster about two inches long and there were workings on

it as though it was a part broken off some figurine. There was a faint red stain on it, too. Another tour of the room convinced him that there was no visible object from which it could have been broken.

Carefully, he wrapped it in his handkerchief and put it in his pocket.

The doctors did not seem to notice as he slipped out of the room.

A girl was sitting at a reception desk in the anteroom to Miss Ruskin's office, a girl with a sensational figure and slanting green eyes which appraised Trant cynically. She rose as he passed her and, when he moved on to the door of Miss Ruskin's office, called a monitory: "Hey!" But he paid her no attention and walked into the inner room.

Miss Ruskin did not hear him immediately. She was seated behind her desk, holding two framed photographs and studying them. When she noticed Trant, she made a move as if to conceal one of the photographs in a drawer. She must, however, have realized it was too late to do so without arousing suspicion. She put both photographs down on the desk and smiled awkwardly.

Trant joined her at the desk. One glance at the photograph was sufficient for him to recognize the handsome face of Kenneth Winters, Madeline's illustrious father. Still flushing, Miss Ruskin picked up the other photograph and held it out for his inspection.

"Madeline's mother," she said softly. "She was my best friend. She died eight years ago. Since then I've thought of Madeline almost as my own daughter."

"I'm sorry." Trant's voice was gentle. "A tragedy. She was so young. How old was she? Sixteen?"

"No, no. She was eighteen last month."

"Rather old to be still at school, wasn't she?"

"Madeline preferred to stay with me. She didn't want to go to college until things were more —more settled." She rose, standing very erect behind the desk. "Dr. Graves has told you about the accident?"

"Just the medical facts."

"I expect you will want to see the garage where it happened." Miss Ruskin picked up a key from the desk. "Let me take you there now."

Together they left the building and crossed the campus.

"Poor Madeline," said Miss Ruskin. "Last night was to have been such a gala night for her. Harry, her brother, was here and her friend, Lane Stevens. They're both just out of the Army."

"They've been told?"

"Not yet. I have telephoned Harry to come. He should be here soon."

They reached an area of gravel behind the central building. A line of white garages stretched in front of them. Miss Ruskin went to one of them and gave Timothy the key.

Timothy unlocked the rather flimsy door and swung it open. Miss Ruskin followed him inside. A black sedan was parked there. The door by the driver's seat was open. Very pale now, Miss Ruskin pointed down to the stone floor beside the open car door.

"I found her lying there, lieutenant. It was about five o'clock this morning. I awoke and heard a car engine running. I was worried. I thought perhaps that some straggler from the dance was in difficulties. I dressed and came down. I could see no car but I could still hear the engine. The sound came from this garage, but the door was closed. It is my personal garage."

She turned her steady gaze on Trant's face. "The door was closed, not locked. I opened it. I saw Madeline lying there in her white dress. I realized the danger from carbon monoxide. I dragged her out into the fresh air. I administered artificial respiration. I did everything I could, but I saw it was too late. I carried her in my arms up to her room. Then I called Dr. Graves."

The controlled suffering on her face commanded Timothy's respect. Quietly, he said:

"And there was a reason why Madeline should have been in your garage?"

"Certainly." Miss Ruskin's voice was severe as if she were coping with a foolish question from one of her students. "Madeline was one of the few girls at the school old enough to have a driving license. I let her use my car as her own. She had probably driven her brother or Lane to the station. I imagine she brought the car back into the garage and—"

Miss Ruskin moved to the garage door and swung it back and forth on its hinges.

"As you see, this door is light and loose on its hinges. The slightest breeze closes it. I had been meaning to have it fixed for some time." She gestured toward a stylized figurine of an Egyptian cat about twelve inches in height which lay on its side by the open car door. "Normally I use that door stopper to keep the door from swinging to."

Timothy looked at the cat and nodded. "So you think Madeline drove in. The door slammed shut behind her. The engine was still running. She opened the door to get out and maybe fainted?"

"Not fainted," put in Miss Ruskin sharply. "You notice where the cat is standing. I think she opened the door to get out. I think she tripped on her long

skirt and fell, striking her head against the cat. The blow rendered her unconscious. The engine was running and the door was shut." She paused. "Both Dr. Graves and I think it happened that way."

Miss Ruskin was hovering by the door. "You have seen enough?"

Timothy gave her a disarming smile. "Guess I should look around a little—just a matter of form, Miss Ruskin. But you're a busy woman. I won't keep you."

"Yes, yes, of course." She hesitated a moment and then started walking briskly toward the house.

Alone, Timothy searched the garage. Everything pointed almost too clearly to Miss Ruskin's theory of the death. The garage door was light and could easily have blown shut. The statue of the cat lay exactly where it should have been lying if Madeline had tripped getting out of the car and had fallen against it.

Timothy picked up the cat. It was white and made from heavy plaster. Its thin Egyptian mouth smirked enigmatically beneath inscrutable eyes. But Timothy was not looking at its smile. He was looking at its right ear, or rather, at the place where the right ear should have been.

It had been broken off.

And, on the plaster head near the abrasure, was a faint red stain.

Whistling under his breath, Timothy drew his handkerchief from his pocket. He took from it the small piece of worked plaster he had found at the side of Madeline's bed. He set it against the place on the statue where the ear had been broken off.

It fitted perfectly.

## III

THE GIRL with the sardonic green eyes was with Miss Ruskin when Timothy returned to the office, but a nod from Miss Ruskin dismissed her. The headmistress of the Ruskin School gave Trant a steady look.

"There is something else you want to know?"

Timothy dropped into the chair opposite her.

"This boy you mentioned who was Madeline's guest last night —Lane Stevens. Were they engaged to be married?"

Miss Ruskin's mouth drooped in a sad smile. "They were both too young really to understand how they felt. They hadn't known each other for long. Lane was a friend of my secretary, Miss Price. He and Madeline may have thought they were attracted."

"There'd been no talk of marriage then?"

"Madeline was much too young even to consider marriage," repeated Miss Ruskin with some sternness. "If the

question had come up, I would have advised against it. Besides, Lane—well, he's a nice boy but he's been overseas in the Army for three years and needs to adjust himself to civilian life before he'd make a fit husband for any one."

"He's wild?" Timothy returned her inflexible stare. "Wild enough to have done something —violent?"

"I don't understand." Miss Ruskin's face was blank; then a look of extraordinarily undisciplined terror sprang into her eyes. "You can't mean you think Madeline was . . . ?"

"Policemen are funny people, Miss Ruskin. They have to look on the worst side. I'm not suggesting, of course, that Stevens murdered Madeline. I'm not even suggesting she was murdered. I'm only covering a point that has to be covered."

Miss Ruskin seemed reassured by this speech, but she insisted: "How could a young girl whom everyone loved have any enemies?"..

"She has a famous father and a famous man automatically has enemies. He is also a rich man. I believe the late Mrs. Winters was rich, too, wasn't she?"

Miss Ruskin nodded stiffly.

"Do you happen to know, Miss Ruskin, how the late Mrs. Winters left her money?"

"I do." Miss Ruskin's voice was even. "Marianne Winters left three trust funds. One for Harry, her son. One for Madeline."

"And the third for her husband?"

"The third share," said Miss Ruskin, "was left to me. I was Marianne's closest friend. She wanted me to realize my life's ambition—to start this school for girls."

Timothy gulped. "I see," he said. He hesitated. "And the disposition of Madeline's trust fund now that she is dead?"

"I really couldn't tell you that, lieutenant. You would have to consult the family lawyer. I—"

She broke off as a young, slender boy with a mane of blond hair strode into the room. He was wearing a suit that was obviously new and there was an Army discharge button in his lapel. He approached the desk.

"I got your call, Aunt Connie. What's the matter? Is it Maddy?"

Miss Ruskin rose and, crossing to the boy, put her hands on his arms.

"Harry, dear, we've got to be brave. There's been an accident." She nodded to Trant. "This gentleman may have some questions to ask you."

Harry Winters' eyes moved suspiciously to Trant.

"An accident to Maddy?"

"You saw your sister at the dance last night?" asked Trant.

"Of course I saw her."

"She was perfectly normal and

happy, wasn't she, Harry?" said Miss Ruskin quietly.

The boy stared, his face bleak with apprehension. "She seemed kind of strange. I didn't see much of her. She was with Lane most of the time. But when it came time for me to leave I searched for her and asked her if she'd drive me downtown. She said she couldn't. She seemed all het-up about something. I figured she and Lane must have quarreled. As I kissed her good night she asked if I had a drink on me."

"A drink!" exclaimed Miss Ruskin. "Harry, you know Madeline never touched liquor."

"I know she didn't. That's part of what worried me. I tried to make her tell me what was wrong, but she wouldn't. She—" He broke off, swinging around to Trant challengingly. "What is all this anyway?"

Miss Ruskin glanced pleadingly at Trant. He nodded. The headmistress took Harry's hand.

"Let's go into another room for a while."

Timothy said: "Perhaps you'd be good enough to ask your secretary to come here, Miss Ruskin."

"Betty Price?" Miss Ruskin seemed startled. Then she added: "Very well."

They left and almost immediately Miss Betty Price appeared from the outer office. In spite of her elegant hair-do, her craftily cut black suit and the faint fragrance of expensive perfume she brought with her, Timothy Trant was not impressed by Miss Price. Her personality and her curves had both been discreetly subdued to conform with the respectability of the Ruskin School, but he sensed that her spiritual home was a dime-a-dance honky tonk.

Miss Price seemed no more impressed with him than he was with her. The green eyes studied him imperturbably.

"Miss Ruskin says you want to question me about Madeline. I can't imagine why."

"You're not meant to imagine, Miss Price. You just answer."

"Okay," drawled Miss Price. "Give with the questions."

"Lane Stevens was quite a friend of yours, wasn't he?"

"He was quite a friend and he still is quite a friend." Miss Price picked a cigarette from a box on the desk and leaned toward Timothy, indicating that he should give her a light. He did. She inhaled deeply.

"Lane Stevens met Madeline through you and they fell in love with each other. Right?"

Miss Price sighed. "So I, in a fit of jealous rage, murdered the girl who'd stolen my man? Is that the idea?"

"Come, come, lieutenant, they have." Miss Price pointed her cigarette at a small boxlike contrivance on the edge of the desk.

"That gadget works two ways. Miss Ruskin can switch it on to speak to me in the outside office. I can switch it on to speak to her. I switched it on—and listened."

"Interested?"

"Just inquisitive. Like a policeman." Miss Price smiled. "You don't seem to have grasped my character. I think I should tell you about my character. I don't know whether Madeline was murdered or not. And I don't particularly care. But I didn't murder her. If I wanted to get a man back, I'd use subtler methods."

"And you wanted to get Lane Stevens back?"

"Really, policeman, it's no concern of yours. But, since I'm so sweet and eager to cooperate—" She shrugged. "Lane and Madeline were both wild. They thought they were crazy about each other. Miss Ruskin was very much against any marriage. So was I." She tapped ash onto the carpet. "For Madeline's sake, of course. She was much too young."

"So you employed subtle methods to do something about it?"

"I had a little girl-to-girl chat with Madeline at the dance."

"Warning her against marrying Stevens?"

"My dear, I thought you were meant to be a particularly sensitive flatfoot. No, nothing so crude. As Miss Ruskin's secretary, I naturally know a lot of things that are not common knowledge. Madeline and I talked about her future, her chances of happiness in general."

"And?"

"And—nothing. That was that."

## IV

TIMOTHY, AS a man, would have enjoyed putting Miss Price over his knee and spanking her. As a detective, he took pains to appear naively bewildered.

Mildly, he said: "And you saw Madeline last night, after your girl-to-girl chat?"

"Naturally."

"Notice anything particularly interesting?"

"Frankly, I did." Betty Price strolled to the window and pointed across the campus. "See that stone bench under those willows? It was about twelve o'clock. I'd come out for a breath of fresh air. There was a moon. I saw Madeline and Lane sitting together on the bench."

"Being amatory?"

"Lane was. He was leaning toward her, talking his head off. I couldn't hear what was going on, but he put his arms around her and kissed her." Betty Price grimaced. "You can imagine my transports of love-sick jealousy. However, Lane didn't appear to be getting any place."

"Madeline didn't let him kiss her?"

"For a moment in there they looked more like a couple of wrestlers than lovers. Madeline broke away fro  him at last. She got up, then she sat down again on the bench as if she felt faint. Lane seemed scared and bewildered. Madeline said something and he hurried off to the marquee. The moment he'd gone, Madeline slipped away behind the bushes.

"Lane came back soon. He had a glass of water. I went up to him. He said that Madeline wasn't feeling well. Then he saw she'd walked out on him and he was sore as a bear; said she'd just put on an act to get rid of him."

Miss Price looked dreamy-eyed. "I felt it my duty as an old friend to console him for a while. Later on, I saw Madeline again. She was perfectly happy, drinking with another boy. He had one of those antiquated pocket flasks."

"The other boy was her brother?"

Miss Price looked surprised. "Oh, no, some red-headed kid. I'd noticed him at the dance."

At that moment there was a tap on the door and a maid came in.

"Lieutenant Stevens to see you, Miss Price."

Timothy looked at Betty Price. "Coincidence?"

"On the contrary. I knew someone would have to tell Lane. I decided it would be less painful for him to hear the news from me."

"Thoughtful," murmured Timothy. "As it happens, I'm afraid he'll have to hear the news from me." He turned to the maid. "Show Lieutenant Stevens in, please."

As the maid slipped away, Betty Price's face registered its first flicker of alarm.

"You don't seriously think anything about Lane, do you? He couldn't hurt a fly. He was terribly fond of Madeline. He wouldn't have—"

"—harmed a hair of her head?" queried Timothy. "Lieutenant Stevens seems to bring out the cliche in you, Miss Price."

Lt. Lane Stevens was a dark powerful young man who could easily have hurt a fly—or an elephant. He stormed into the room and his handsome face was haggard and in need of a shave. It was obvious that he'd had quite a few drinks. He glowered at Betty Price.

"What's the idea dragging me up here?"

Betty Price put her hand on his arm. In the green eyes was a tenderness of which Trant had not suspected her capable.

"There's something you have to know, Lane. I thought it would be easier for you to hear it from me but this—" she jerk-

ed her head at Timothy—"this policeman has other ideas."

"Policeman!" Stevens swung round to Trant and stared at him blankly.

"I'm checking up on a couple of things that happened at the dance."

"Why? What happened?"

"That can wait." Trant watched the young lieutenant gravely. "I'd like you to tell me what happened between you and Madeline Winters."

"Me and Maddy?"

"It's all right, Lane," put in Betty Price softly. "Tell him."

Lane Stevens gave a harsh laugh. "Well, policeman, if you want to know, I might as well tell you. She turned me down. That's all."

"You asked her to marry you?" said Trant.

"Sure." The lieutenant was obviously perplexed and angry and a little apprehensive, too. "Maybe someone can dope out women. I can't. I've been crazy about Maddy for months. I thought she was crazy about me, too. I've got my discharge. I thought last night would be a good time to ask her to marry me. I—" he shrugged "—I never dreamed she'd turn me down. But she did. Wouldn't even let me kiss her. Struggled like a crazy thing and then went kind of rigid in my arms.

"I thought she was going to faint. She sent me off for a glass of water. When I came back with it, she's gone." He laughed again. "I guess I made pretty much of a sucker out of myself."

Trant asked: "Did she give you any reason for turning you down?"

"That's the strange part of it. I'd known from the start that Miss Ruskin was against Maddy marrying till she was older. Maddy and I had kidded about it. I knew Maddy didn't take it seriously. But last night she tried to dish it up to me as a serious reason. I got a feeling she was scared of something, something she'd done maybe, and was holding out on me. But I couldn't get anything out of her."

He found a cigarette with an unsteady hand and lighted it. "Guess I get riled pretty easy anyway. I was going to try to make her come clean, give her another chance. But when she sent me for that water and walked out on me, I saw red. I've got more to do than go down on my bended knees to a girl who's slapped me in the kisser."

Trant was not looking at him now. His eyes had strayed to the taut figure of Betty Price.

"See Madeline again after that, lieutenant?"

"Me?" Lane Stevens shrugged. "No. I was kind of disgusted with life, and Miss Ruskin's lemonade punch wasn't quite the right remedy. I drove downtown and got good and tight." He

stared at Trant belligerently. "Now I've told you all I know, perhaps you'll let me know what's happened."

Trant didn't say anything. Lane Stevens' gaze moved uncertainly to Betty Price.

"It's bad, Lane," she said.

"It isn't Maddy?"

Miss Price nodded. "I'm afraid it is. Hang on to yourself. There was an accident. Maddy's dead."

Lane Stevens' reaction was more dramatic than Timothy had expected. The young lieutenant stared. The color faded from his cheeks. He muttered: "Maddy" weakly. Then he crumpled sideways onto the floor.

Timothy wondered whether the young man had fainted because he had genuinely loved Madeline Winters or whether the collapse had been caused by a combination of shock and alcohol.

It was hard to decide. But as Betty Price ran, stricken, to Stevens and dropped to her knees at his side, one thing was certain.

Miss Ruskin's secretary was indeed "a friend" of Lane Stevens and would never have given him up to another girl without a struggle.

## V

LATER THAT morning, after the wheels of the law had been set in motion, Timothy sat in the Chief's office at the Homicide Bureau. He was staring at the indifferently smirking face of the one-eared plaster cat which sat on the desk between the two men. The broken ear was lying beside it on a piece of cotton waste. They had just been sent back from the police laboratory where it had been established by traces of blood and hair that the statuette had, at some time, been in violent contact with the head of the dead girl.

The chief asked uneasily: "Are you sure it wasn't an accident, Trant? They're important people, you know. Things are going to be plenty rugged around here if we start something without being certain of our ground."

"I'm sorry, sir," Trant was still gazing at the cat. "It's a difficult case and I don't quite understand it yet. But it wasn't an accident."

"What makes you so positive?"

Trant patted the plaster cat's smooth head. "Miss Ruskin's theory about Madeline tripping as she got out of the car and hitting her head on the cat is a perfectly good theory, but unhappily things didn't happen that way. You see, Madeline wasn't hit on the head in the garage."

The chief stared. "She wasn't?"

"I'm afraid not. Miss Ruskin tells me she carried Madeline

from the garage up to her own room. Madeline was wearing a slippery white satin dress. She had no pockets, of course, and her hair was loose. At best, it would have been a grim job getting her up the stairs. Even if it had been caught in her dress or her hair to begin with, it couldn't possibly still have been there by the time Miss Ruskin carried her into the bedroom."

"It," repeated the chief blankly. "What do you mean by 'it'?"

Timothy picked up the plaster cat's ear and held it across the desk. "The ear, sir. Madeline was hit on the head with the plaster cat. The ear broke off. I found the ear on the floor in her bedroom. Since it couldn't have been brought there with Madeline, it must have been there all the time. "In other words, Madeline was hit on the head upstairs in her own bedroom. Presumably someone then carried her and the cat down to the garage and turned on the car engine."

The chief's face creased with consternation. "Murder?"

"Looks that way on the evidence."

"Any more definite ideas?"

"That's the trouble. There were only two clues, and I can't make much sense of either of them yet. We don't have to worry about the scratches on Madeline's arm. They were probably caused in the scuffle with Stevens. But we do have to worry about why she turned him down when she'd obviously been crazy about him. Was that some dirty work of Betty Price's? And we certainly have to worry about the drinks."

"Drinks?"

Timothy nodded. "Madeline never drank. What made her ask her brother for a drink and later go and bum one off a strange young man?"

The chief seemed to find these questions too abstruse to interest him.

"What about motives?"

"Oh, there are motives all right. Rather hackneyed, I'm afraid. Although Miss Ruskin wouldn't admit it, I'm pretty sure she and the brother stand to share Madeline's trust fund. Stevens was wild and probably drunk. He might have sneaked back, had a quarrel and hit her with the cat. As for Miss Price, she's one of those get-your-man babes, capable of anything." Timothy's gray eyes were unhappily reflective. "But why, oh, why the drinks? And, come to think of it, why Dr. Graves?"

The door opened to admit Doc Sanders. The sour little doctor tossed a sheaf of papers onto the chief's desk.

"Laboratory findings."

The chief glanced up at him. "Hope you're not dropping bombshells, too, Sanders. Trant here's just proved the girl was

murdered, hit on the head in her room and then carried down to the garage."

Sanders looked at Timothy and smiled. It was a mysterious and definitely a malicious smile.

"Bright boy that Trant. Sometimes he must even impress himself."

Trant said: "What about the findings? We've explained the scratches. I guess she died of carbon monoxide poisoning, didn't she?"

"Sure," said Sanders.

"And I imagine you found a high percentage of alcohol in the brain?"

"I told you Trant was a bright boy, chief." The sarcasm in Sanders' voice was heavy. "Sure, there was quite a high percentage of alcohol in the brain. His gaze moved to Timothy. "There's something else, too, Trant. You know I hate to make you feel bad—you being so bright and all. But that pretty little theory of yours about the girl being hit on the head in her room and being carried to the garage? Remember that pretty little theory?"

"What about it?" cut in the chief.

Sanders savored his moment of triumph. " 'Fraid our bright boy's been just a little too bright. Autopsy shows the blow on the head was delivered post mortem. In case they don't teach Latin in Princeton, post mortem means after death."

The doctor watched Trant, waiting to see his face fall in disappointment and embarrassment. But Sanders was the one who was disappointed. Timothy's face broke into a sudden, excited smile. He jumped up. He gripped the astonished Sanders' hand and pumped it enthusiastically.

"Swell," he said. "Just fine and dandy. The blow was delivered post mortem. That's wonderful. That's all I wanted to know."

He picked up the plaster cat and made a dive for the door.

"Hey," called the chief. "Where are you going?"

Timothy grinned at him over his shoulder.

"I've just realized who killed Madeline Winters. And I'm a policeman. I've got to do something about it."

In Dr. Harlan Graves' book-lined office, Timothy sat at the desk opposite the distinguished neurologist. Dr. Graves was watching him from sad, impassive eyes.

Timothy said: "Only a very few questions, doctor. In the first place, Miss Ruskin called you this morning even before she called the police because you'd been Madeline's regular physician, a friend of the family. Right?"

The doctor nodded gravely. "That is correct."

"My next question is rather

awkward, doctor. I guess I won't ask it. I'll tell you. You held something back from me this morning. Not for criminal reasons, of course. I realize that. But you know something about Madeline Winters that you didn't tell me."

Dr. Graves' face darkened. "You asked me for my diagnosis of the death. I gave it you in all honesty. I am convinced the accident took place as I outlined it to you."

"I believe you, doctor. But this is something different, something terribly important and I've got to be sure. I think I've guessed the truth. I only ask you to confirm it. That won't be breaking any trust. I'll even tell you the facts that gave me the clue. You will be able to decide then whether I'm on the right track or not."

"Dr. Graves watched him steadily. "Very well, lieutenant. Tell me these facts."

"In the first place, Madeline was eighteen and still at the Ruskin School. In the second place, Madeline did not drink. In the third place, Miss Ruskin was dead set against her marriage. Miss Ruskin knew something and you know something which explains all those three facts."

The ghost of a smile showed in the neurologist's eyes. "And your own explanation for those three facts?"

Timothy picked up a pencil from the desk. He pulled a prescription pad toward him and wrote on it a single word. He handed the pad to Graves.

"You don't have to say anything, doctor. If I'm right, just nod."

Dr. Graves studied the prescription blank. He looked up, then nodded very slowly.

Timothy said: "Mr. Winters knew?"

"No one knew," said Dr. Graves softly, "except Miss Ruskin and myself."

"I'm afraid that's not quite true." Timothy rose to take his leave. His face was grim. "A third party found out about it, too. Someone who didn't love Madeline. And that's why Madeline Winters had to die."

## VI

LIEUTENANT TRANT and Miss Ruskin surveyed each other warily. On Miss Ruskin's desk at their side the plaster cat smiled its incalculable smile. Timothy knew the truth now. He respected Miss Ruskin. He did not relish what would have to come.

"I've just seen Dr. Graves, Miss Ruskin. I made him admit what he knew. I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to admit it, too."

Miss Ruskin's lashes flickered. "Admit what?"

"You found Madeline in the garage dead from carbon monoxide poisoning. You carried

her upstairs. You went downstairs for the plaster cat. You brought it to her room and—" his voice was very quiet "—and you struck her on the head with it."

The color started to creep from the headmistress' face. But she did not speak.

"You loved Madeline as if she were your own daughter," continued Timothy. "It must have been a terrible thing for you to do, but it was courageous. You never dreamed that the blow on the head would make me suspect murder. By planting the plaster cat by the open front door of the car, you thought we would accept your accident theory." He paused. "You did it because you were desperately anxious to keep us from knowing what really happened."

Miss Ruskin glanced fleetingly at the plaster cat and then stared down at her smooth, competent hands.

"Just what do you expect me to say, lieutenant?" she whispered.

"I don't want you to say anything, Miss Ruskin. All you need do is listen. When you found Madeline dead in the garage, you realized exactly what had happened. Someone had got her drunk, shut her in the garage, turned on the car engine—and killed her. You tried to fake the death to look like an accident partly, I suppose, to avert a scandal in your school. But I think you did it mostly to protect the two people who meant most to you in the world, Madeline and —her father, Kenneth Winters."

The color flooded back into Miss Ruskin's cheeks. She looked at Trant with a kind of incredulous awe.

"How do you know all that? It's uncanny."

"Not uncanny, Miss Ruskin. Just average canniness. After the medical evidence showed the blow was post mortem, the rest was simple."

"You—you really know the whole truth?"

"There were enough clues. All I needed from Graves was confirmation."

"And the clues?"

"Madeline was old enough to be at college, but you kept her here with you. She was in love with Stevens, but you were dead against that marriage or any other marriage for her. Your excuse was that she was too young, but many girls marry happily at eighteen. Madeline never drank. And, most important of all, Dr. Graves was her regular physician. It isn't normal for a girl to have a neurologist for her regular physician, unless there is something wrong with her neurotically."

His eyes were fixed almost sadly on Miss Ruskin's face.

"Madeline's behavior at the dance told me the rest. Until

then, she'd had no idea there was anything wrong with her, had she? You and Doctor Graves had protected her. But at the dance she found out. That's what made her refuse Lane Stevens, although she loved him.

"The shock of the discovery coupled with the emotional distress of turning down the boy she loved brought on an attack, didn't it? I should have guessed it. I should have guessed the moment Lane Stevens described her going rigid in his arms. She sent him away to get water so he wouldn't realize. Then she ran away into the bushes to hide."

Timothy's hand played absently over the plaster cat's back. "I didn't have to be a doctor to realize what was the matter with her. After all, there aren't many conditions a girl can have and yet be completely unaware she is sick. Once I knew she had gone rigid, it was obvious. That's how I realized Madeline Winters had epilepsy."

Miss Ruskin was sitting very still, her hands folded in her lap.

"There's hardly any need to tell the rest," murmured Timothy. "Madeline, who thought she had everything to live for, suddenly discovered that she had nothing. She was young and things hit you harder when you are young. She'd renounced the man she loved. The very word epilepsy is a nightmare to someone ignorant of medicine.

"She looked forward to a future of sickness, horror and loneliness. She couldn't face it. That's why she begged drinks, to pluck up courage for what she had to do. Because it was Madeline herself, wasn't it, who shut herself, in the garage and turned on the car engine?"

He paused and added gently: "That's the truth you were trying so hard to conceal. You were ready to risk your own safety on the chance that you'd be able to keep Kenneth Winters from ever knowing that his daughter had been an epileptic—and a suicide."

Miss Ruskin had risen. She moved to the window and stood gazing out with her back to Trant.

"It was awful, what I did. Awful and terribly foolish. I realize that now. There was a suicide note. I destroyed it. I knew it would have killed Kenneth if he'd ever known." Slowly she turned to face Trant. "Now that you know the truth, what are you going to do?"

Trant smiled at her, a slow, reassuring smile. "Justice and the technical truth, don't always go hand in hand, Miss Ruskin. In a case like this, I don't think we're much interested in the technical truth. I shall do all I can to have a verdict of accidental death brought at the inquest. It shouldn't be difficult to arrange."

Beneath the pure white hair, Miss Ruskin's face lightened with a radiance that made it beautiful. "You are very good, lieutenant."

"Don't be silly." Timothy grinned. "One day maybe I'll have kids of my own. If you try to flunk them in algebra, I'll blackmail you."

His face grew grave again. "There's one point we still haven't covered, Miss Ruskin. The point of how Madeline discovered at the dance that she was not well."

"Yes, yes. I wondered," she agreed quickly.

"You don't have to wonder. You thought that you and Dr. Graves were the only two who knew. That wasn't quite right. Someone else knew. Someone who has access to your private papers."

Miss Ruskin stared. "You can't mean . . . ?"

"Lane Stevens was introduced to Madeline by Betty Price," said Trant grimly. "Miss Price is not the sort of girl who likes her men taken away from her. I'm broad-minded but even I don't think it's very attractive to taunt a girl, even a rival, with the unhappy fact that she's an epileptic."

Miss Ruskin's face was stern. "You really think Betty Price did that?"

"Personally," said Timothy, studying the nails of his left hand, "I'd make a law which could punish that sort of cruelty. But unfortunately no law like that exists right now. Even so, I imagine it wouldn't be difficult for you to find another secretary, would it?"

"I don't imagine that it will be difficult at all," said Miss Ruskin crisply.

Timothy nodded to her, picked up the plaster cat and, with it under his arm, moved out of the office.

Miss Betty Price was seated at her desk, languidly smoking a cigarette. The hard green eyes moved sardonically to Timothy's sober, unsmiling face.

"Well, policeman, how are we coming? Found out who killed Madeline yet?"

"Yes," said Timothy. "Madeline was killed by a cat."

"That unattractive object under your arm?"

"No," said Timothy. "A different type of cat. Maybe I should say a dog. A female dog."

Miss Price blew an indifferent smoke ring. "Am I supposed to understand what you're talking about?"

"Not necessarily." Timothy smiled at her evenly. "But it shouldn't take you long. Miss Ruskin wants to talk to you in her office."

—Continued from back cover

# Yes! YOU GET $15.00 WORTH OF MYSTERIES AT ONCE—FREE!

*Including These Very Latest Smash Hits of*

## ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

IMAGINE GETTING $15 worth of new mysteries right away—FREE! Full-length hard-bound books by "champion" mystery authors. SIX great books in all—TWO of them by the "Undisputed King of Mystery Writers," Erle Stanley Gardner! PLUS thrillers by Agatha Christie, Anthony Gilbert, Roy Vickers, and Victor Canning! You get *six* new books that would actually cost you a total of $15 if you bought them, but now they're yours FREE.

Why do we make such a generous offer? We feel that this giant gift package will prove (far better than mere words ever could) the advantages of membership in the famous Detective Book Club—the only club that brings you the very latest NEW mysteries *at one third the usual cost!*

### *The Cream of the Best NEW Mysteries*

Out of the 300 or more new detective books that come out every year, the Club selects the very "cream of the crop"—by top-notch authors like Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, Mignon Eberhart, Anthony Gilbert, and Leslie Ford. ALL THESE, and many *other* famous authors have had their books selected by the Club. Many of them are members of the Club themselves!

Club selections are ALL newly published books. As a member, you get THREE of them *complete* in one handsome volume (a $6.00 to $7.50 value) for only $1.89. So you get THREE new mysteries FOR LESS THAN THE PRICE OF ONE!

### *You Take ONLY The Books You Want*

You do NOT have to take a volume every month. You receive a free copy of the Club's "Preview," which will fully describe all coming selections and you may reject any volume in advance. You need NOT take any specific number of books—only the ones you want. NO money in advance; NO membership fees. You may cancel membership any time you please.

### *You Enjoy These Five Advantages*

(1) You get the cream of the finest BRAND-NEW detective books—by the best authors. (2) You save TWO-THIRDS the usual cost. (3) You take ONLY the books you want. (4) The volumes are fresh and clean—delivered right to your door. (5) They are so well printed and bound that they grow into a library you'll be proud to own.

### *Mail Postcard for 6 FREE Books*

SEND NO MONEY. Simply mail postcard promptly, and we will send you at once—FREE—the six complete mystery thrillers described here, together with the current triple-volume containing three other complete new detective books. Clip the valuable postcard now, and mail it at once to:

**DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, Roslyn, L. I., N. Y.**

**ALL SIX BOOKS FREE**

**SEND NO MONEY—JUST MAIL POSTCARD**

50

**MAIL THIS POSTCARD NOW FOR YOUR SIX FREE BOOKS**

•

**NO POSTAGE NEEDED**

**Walter J. Black, President**
**DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB**
**Roslyn, L. I., New York**

ED

Please enroll me as a member and send me FREE, in regular publisher's editions, the SIX new full-length mystery novels pictured on this page. In addition send me the current triple-volume, which contains three complete detective books.

I am not obligated to take any specific number of volumes. I am to receive an advance description of all forthcoming selections and I may reject any book before or after I receive it. I may cancel membership whenever I wish.

I need send no money now, but for each volume I decide to keep I will send you only $1.89 plus a few cents mailing charges as complete payment within one week after I receive it. (*Books shipped in U. S. A. only.*)

Mr.
Mrs.
Miss } .....

(PLEASE PRINT PLAINLY)

Address.....

City.....Zone No. (if any).....State.....

# Free- All Six of these Thrill-Packed Mysteries!

TO NEW MEMBERS

Including These Very Latest Smash Hits of

## ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

ALL FULL LENGTH BOOKS RETAIL PRICE $15.00

## JUST MAIL POSTCARD TO GET THESE SIX GREAT NEW MYSTERIES FREE —AT ONCE!

1 THE CASE OF THE **TERRIFIED TYPIST**

**By Erle Stanley Gardner**

The surprise witness Perry Mason's counting on to save his client DISAPPEARS. Then she turns up in the courtroom as the star witness *for* the D. A. — *against Perry's client!*

2 THE CASE OF THE **NERVOUS ACCOMPLICE**

**By Erle Stanley Gardner**

Mason's defending beautiful Sybil Harlan, on trial for MURDER. The D A. has an open-and-shut case against her. All Perry can offer in her defense is — *a pile of rusty scrap iron!*

3 **SO MANY STEPS TO DEATH**

**By Agatha Christie**

Hilary Craven poses as the wife of a missing scientist to help lead British Intelligence to him She doesn't know he's the prisoner of a mad man who collects — *human brains!*

4 **BURDEN OF PROOF**

**By Victor Canning**

You're falsely convicted of murder. The only way to prove your innocence is to track down the *real killer*. But you're in a prison from which no man has ever escaped—*and lived to tell about it!*

5 **A QUESTION OF MURDER**

**By Anthony Gilbert**

Detective Crook, Miss Shepherd and Dr Lamb ignore Margaret Reeve's suspicions of *murder. Crook, Shepherd, Lamb* — should know they're leading her to the *slaughter!*

6 **DOUBLE IMAGE**

**By Roy Vickers**

YOU have a "double" who has fooled your uncle, your banker, even *your wife!* Now he's going to commit a MURDER — and make certain that YOU hang for HIS CRIME!

FIRST CLASS
PERMIT No. 47
(Sec. 34.9, P.L.&R.)
Roslyn, N.Y.

**BUSINESS REPLY CARD**

No Postage Stamp Necessary If Mailed in the United States

**4¢ POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY**

**DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB**

**ROSLYN, L. I.**

**NEW YORK**

**DON'T MISS OUT ON THIS SENSATIONAL OFFER!**

•

**MAIL POSTCARD AT ONCE!**

— continued on inside cover